

# The Barnes Foundation

## Journal of the Art Department

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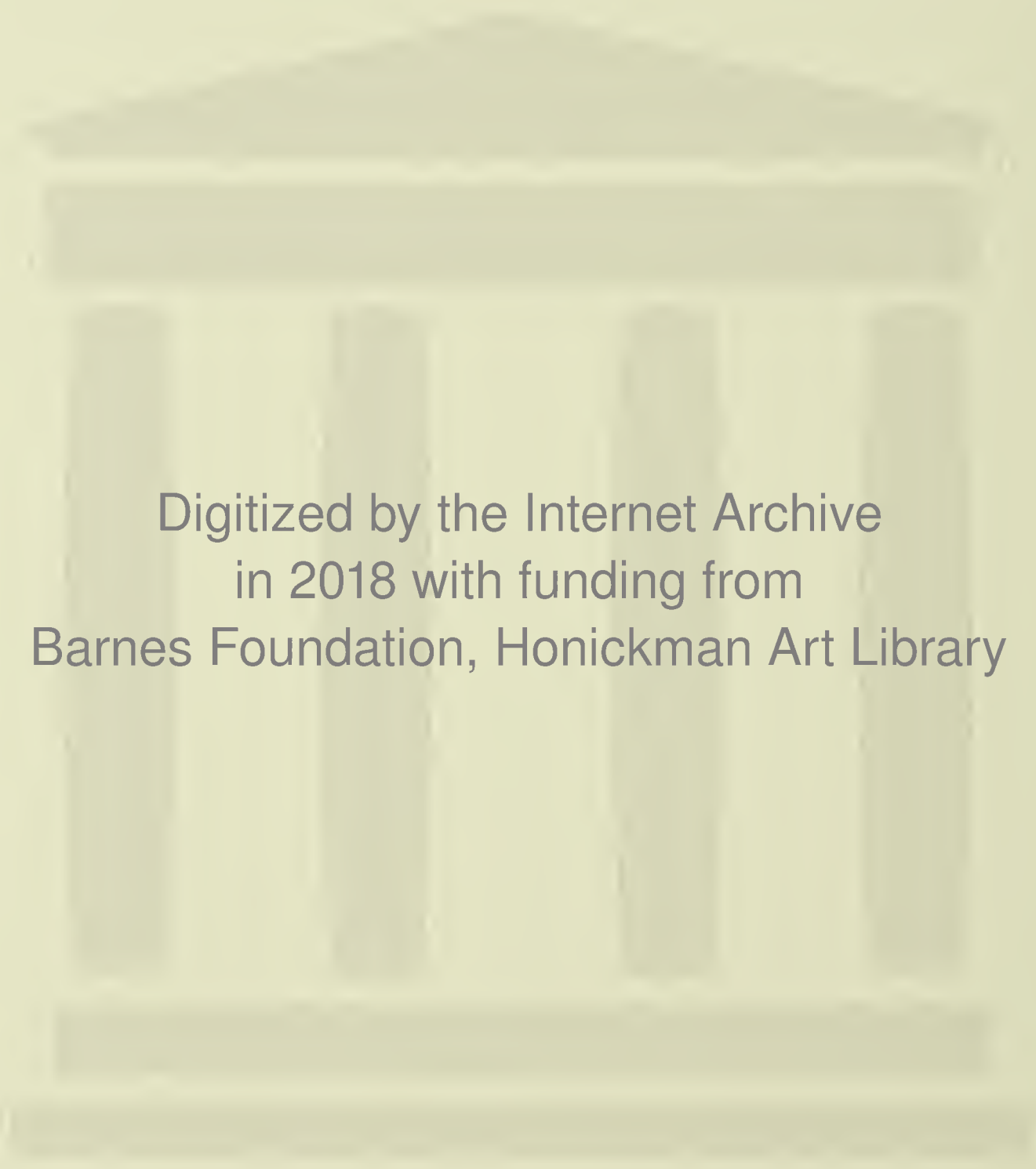
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## Journal of the Art Department

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The Barnes Foundation School of the Art Department



# JOURNAL *of* THE ART DEPARTMENT

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## What to Look for in Art\*

*by* VIOLETTE DE MAZIA†

### I

IN this essay we shall concern ourselves with what is specific to the artist's perception, to the esthetic experience, and with the aspects and values of our visual world which are of art's domain and by art revealed and enriched. Our problem is to find the answer to the question, "What should we look for in the work of the artist?"

No material answer to this fundamental question can be given in a few words or sentences, unless it be that we should look for what the artist has done. But to be told this is to be told next to nothing, for that is precisely wherein lies the source of so much misunderstanding, among art-students and painters no less than among laymen. What does the artist do? What should a person accomplish in order to be an artist? What should we as viewers expect from his work and, consequently, look for in it? These are, of course, all but one and the same question, and the answer to it, clearly indispensable to a genuine understanding of art's significance to mankind, must be found in the work of art itself as it relates to human nature constantly interacting with the environment of things, situations and people.

\* Adapted from class material.

† Director of Education

The belief that the artist's interest or purpose is that of recording, as is, what in nature is "beautiful" (the "gorgeous" scenery, the "lovely" peach, the "beautiful" girl) is perhaps still the most widespread illusion concerning art's intent and function. This misconception leads people to assert that an artist's sole requirement or distinction is a technical ability to re-produce on canvas, in clay, wood or stone the accurate image of the "beautiful" as it exists, with the result that judgment of art-merit becomes confused with assessment of the degree of success with which the "beautiful" is recorded, *i.e.*, the man's craftsmanship, how well he says his say and whether what he says is accurate. Craftsmanship or technique—a useful tool indeed, yet essentially but a tool, a means to some end—is thus taken to be an end in itself, to be looked for as a criterion of "good" art, while, truly, that gift of the hand, so to speak, is nothing more nor less than what in another field is referred to as the gift of gab: with the one as with the other the merit of the end it is put to serve, what the artist or the speaker says with his means, remains to be seen and judged.

In neither instance, looking at a work of art for a felicitous selection and more or less accurate rendering of nature and at the worker for his skill in execution, may one be said to be concerning himself with the domain of art or with what makes it significant to human existence. Indeed, under this view art cannot but be judged wholly superfluous to life, for what we can learn from it is always to be got much more richly, deeply and tellingly from "the real thing." And to hold such a view we must ignore what every one of us knows from birth—that other human beings are interesting, are capable of affecting and enriching our own experience of nature, are the very source of our sense of there being meaning to what we see, feel and understand. An "artist" who is content merely to select what he finds beautiful in nature and to do his best to re-produce it relinquishes his birthright as a human creature; and to mistake such attempts for art or to look for this attempt as a criterion of art-merit is to deny the very significance of being human in a world rich with material on which to test and exercise our powers of intelligence and feeling.



Furthermore, to dispose of the question of judgment of art by insisting that we look for the "beautiful" still leaves the basic problem unresolved, since what we describe as beautiful is by definition and common usage of the term simply that which charms and appeals to our tastes; beauty, as we have justly been told, "is in the eye of the beholder," not in the object beheld, and when we say of a thing that it is "beautiful" or "ugly" (not "beautiful") we describe nothing of an objective nature about the outside situation but express only the fact that personally we like or dislike it. And while the subjective aspect—our personal tastes, preferences, idiosyncrasies and allergies—is always there to channel our experiences and color their meanings, while, that is, we respond to anything basically because we do have powers of liking and disliking, it is evident that the source of this response—whether a painting, a person or a situation we find ourselves in—is not made up of "like" or "dislike" but of attributes and characteristics essential to *its* distinctive nature. And, of course, in art as anywhere it is towards those characteristics that we must look if we are to arrive at an understanding of any specific purpose.

That we so readily use the word "beautiful" in the context of art, or point to its appeal to us as a criterion of merit, is, however, indicative of the nature of the attributes with which art as an object of our experience is concerned. Art is a medium of expression of which the audience is the human race as a whole, and it talks to all of us because what it conveys is expressed in terms of *broad human values*, or, stated differently, in terms of qualities belonging to the objects and situations of the world around us which human beings in general, be they living in Philadelphia, Timbuktu or any other region of the earth, are by nature more or less sensitive to and can, under propitious conditions, respond to with an inherent sense of satisfaction. These include such qualities, to mention only a few, as delicacy, gentleness, sensuousness, novelty, power, gracefulness, drama, brightness, cheerfulness, rhythm, variety, harmony, unity, aliveness, restfulness, subtlety and so on—qualities, in short, which make up the meaning of our encounters with the outside world.

In saying this, we do not say that what there is for us to

find in art is merely what we can recognize in it of any of these broad human values which we have come to know ourselves through various other experiences. Far from documenting, confirming and perpetuating what is already known, the work of art records the experience, its meanings and attendant feelings, of a particular individual—an individual who is capable of feeling both *like* other members of the human race to which he belongs and also *unlike* them because of those complex factors (heredity, education, environment and native sensitivity) that make him the person he is, a person no one else has ever been or can ever be. From this it follows that when we look at the artist's piece of work we look at the work of *another* human being, one who differs in many respects from any of us as well as from any other artist; and, consequently, one obvious thing we should expect, hence look for, is something which is *his*, which is *new*, then and every time, since it came to exist and be whatever it is as a result of that person's having responded to and experienced, with *his* interest, *his* background, *his* feelings, what is a bit of the world we may all know and feel about in a same general way. We face, for instance, a situation of power—the power of a storm at sea, of a personality or of someone's statement in words, color or stone—and we all tend to be impressed by that quality of power. We come in contact with what is delicate or subtle, and we likewise tend to be impressed, although differently. This we have in common; this it is that permits communication between and understanding of one another. But with every instance of common basic understanding, there are, of course, an endless number of possible variations in the manner in which each of us is impressed and reacts, hence also in the meanings derived, the feelings aroused and the consequent actions taken. There are those who are awed and paralyzed by the effect which power exercises upon them, and they submit to it, as when a person's speechlessness in front of a Cézanne or a Tintoretto bespeaks his powerlessness. Others in the very same situation will be empowered by the impact; their experience of the powerful acts as an incentive and a challenge. Tintoretto was, in that sense, empowered to paint his *Christ and The Woman of Samaria* (Plate 1) by



the effect upon him of a powerfully majestic landscape and by the power the historical-religious episode itself held for him. El Greco later was in turn incited by Tintoretto's powerful contrasts of light and dark to create his own powerfully dramatic, lightning-like, expressive patterns.\* And Cézanne was stimulated to paint the majestic composition *Valley of The Arc Viewed from Bellevue* (Plate 3) by the power of that massive mountain and vast valley in the South of France and by the power, too, expressed by the Venetian masters, in particular Titian and Tintoretto, whose work he studied. In like fashion, Soutine was aroused to create the grippingly dramatic portrait *Woman with Hat* (Plate 4) by what he saw, what he felt, of power in the sitter's personality, perhaps, and in the work of Tintoretto‡, El Greco¶, Rembrandt† and Cézanne§. He was not daunted, intimidated or overcome; he did not succumb to their effect upon him. None of these artists—Tintoretto, El Greco, Cézanne, Soutine—sentimentally submitted to, by merely accepting, the power of the effects which impressed him. None of them, that is, did as many art-students do, psychologically commit suicide, when they give up or compromise their own interests and feelings and merely acquiesce to, by imitating, what in others impresses them by its power.

As with power, so with the impact of all other broad human values: we tend to be impressed in the sense that, as a rule, they do not leave us cold or uninterested. Most of us are charmed by what is subtle—by color modulations in a painting by Renoir, for instance, or its space recession. And, baffled as we may all more or less feel because of the non-obvious manner by which the subtlety has been effected, some of us will leave it at that—at the mental kind of sensuousness that the subtlety affords; those who do so simply feel it and allow the feeling to ripple off their minds. Others will be annoyed by whatever there is in the subtlety that escapes them; their enjoyment is short-lived, and they leave

\* See, e.g., El Greco's *Annunciation* (Plate 2).

‡ Cf., e.g., the drama of light and dark in Tintoretto's *Christ and The Woman of Samaria* (Plate 1).

¶ Cf., e.g., the angular pattern of light in El Greco's *Annunciation* (Plate 2).

† Cf., e.g., Rembrandt's *Portrait of an Old Man* (Plate 5).

§ Cf., e.g., Cézanne's *Madame Cézanne with Green Hat* (Plate 6).

it at that—at the annoyance of their being baffled by the subtle effects. Still others will investigate the ways and means by which such a painter as Renoir produced that particular quality: brushstrokes characteristic of the Impressionists' broken color and the transparent wash-like glazes of the Venetians, with each of these technical devices tempering, as it modifies, the effect specific to the other. By this discovery, needless to say, of the what and how, the experience of the subtle effects is materially intensified: to the pleasurable perception of the subtlety itself is added the satisfaction of understanding what brings it about and, therefore, also the satisfaction of being in a position legitimately to judge of it as either superficial or convincing, novel or imitative, pretentious or honest, and so on.

Returning to the main point of our argument, we should not lose sight of the fact that with all the above and many more variations which are bound to occur in our individual responses to a given broad human value, it remains that we are human beings all, including the artists, and that this establishes the common ground on which we can meet and understand each other. Nevertheless, though starting off with this helpful bond, we are all too often diverted onto irrelevant paths because we look not for what is there but for what we want to see, namely, what we already know, what we already like. And if that natural human tendency to seek out the familiar is not balanced by a need to venture into the new, *i.e.*, a desire to learn, then life cannot but become a series of repetitive episodes which, however comfortable they may make us feel, erode our powers of intellect and passion and leave us bereft of purpose. The particular province of the painter's art is the visual world, and its intent is always to discover something new about that world in terms of the qualities, the broad human values, through which what we meet has significance for us and to share these discoveries with the whole of mankind. That is to say, the artist is a teacher.

## II

Our taste for the familiar and for what we already like leads to many irrelevant responses to art and misconcep-



tions about its intent. One of these is exemplified by people, art-students included, who mistake the nostalgic for the esthetic. "Why tell me what I should look for?" they say; "Renoir's pictures? I love them, I love those chubby faces, and I think that he is a wonderful artist!" Of course, no real thinking has taken place, since, for what those persons love, the chubby faces, which make them admire Renoir and pronounce him great as an artist, they do not need the Renoir painting; in fact, they can get exactly the same emotional thrill from any sort of color daub or nondescript print, provided, naturally, that some chubby face is there to arouse their "love" of the picture. Similarly, someone goes into ecstatic praise of an early canvas by Renoir, in which the color-ensemble is pervasively blue, because, it is ingenuously volunteered, he is "so partial to blue." These instances are on a par with the case of the collector who buys any and all paintings, drawings, etchings and lithographs which deal with scenes of Manayunk as subjects; he loves them, he says, when in reality it is Manayunk, where he happens to have spent his youth, which is the actual object of his love and devotion, and for sentimental rather than esthetic reasons, at that. Basically in the same category so far as its relevancy to art is concerned is the following episode reported by a young artist who had asked a friend of his, an outdoor type of man, to make the rounds of the New York galleries with him. Tagging along, the friend was genuinely nonplussed as to what interest there could possibly be in any of those paintings by Matisse, Picasso and other modern artists that were exhibited. Later on, singling out a large print, *Wild Ducks in Flight*, on display in a print-shop window, he exclaimed, "Now look, this I can understand, and I think that this is great art. As you know," he continued, "wild-duck hunting is my favorite sport, and I tell you that the way these ducks here are shown is exactly the way these birds take off from the water!" Obviously, this man, who looked for and found in that print a confirmation of what he already knew, would instantaneously refuse to accept as art a water-scene with ducks painted by an Impressionist artist, since he never knew ducks to look like just bits of shimmery color.

And but one step away from this is another category of people we may have to contend with, people who rebel at being shown what the artist has done because it is a foregone conclusion with them that, whatever they may be shown, the picture is either good or bad according to whether they like or dislike it, according, that is, to a very arbitrary or personal "taste." Such was the student who asserted that Botticelli was a great master, as were also Rossetti and Burne-Jones, because, he explained, the type of woman these men portrayed is the type of woman that he admires! That sort of thing is exactly like declaring, and involves a similar degree of self-deception, that a girl is wonderful because she has wonderful blue eyes. And the student, needless to say, does not care to be shown, cannot be shown, cannot be led to see—until he gets rid of his illusions or misconceptions about art—that what not the type of woman but the picture is might well pull its painter down to quite a low rung on the ladder of art-merit.

Finally, there are people who may not even give themselves or others any reasons for their feelings. They reject all analysis; they simply know they love that picture or that person, just as teen-age kids adore Frank Sinatra or Paul McCartney; they are simply "wild" about him, just as they are "crazy" about chocolate fudge, for they drool, too, at the mention or at the thought of it. They like what they like—the picture, the blue-eyed girl, Frankie, Paul or chocolate fudge—because they like it, and they do not know or care to know whether the fudge or the girl is wholesome, whether Sinatra or McCartney has music in his voice or whether the picture could be rewarding of intelligent enjoyment.

Infatuation, not appreciation, is the word for such liking of a thing or a person without any substantiating reasons. And it is infatuation, not genuine love, which is blind. Infatuation, or the sort of reaction to people or pictures which we illustrated, is an altogether different thing from appreciating what a person or a picture is by way of, as a result of, our getting to *know* what the person or the picture is and then whether he or it deserves our admiration on the basis of more valid assets than a pair of blue eyes, a bow-tie, a chubby face or a blue color-scheme. But if we start off with a



gushing or a swooning—that is, purely emotionally—our mind has no chance to function; no perception can take place, for we are arrested, stuck on whatever happens to tickle our fancy or our emotions. And in every one of these instances, judgment, if we can call it that, is baseless because perception, if we can call it that, is inadequate, and, thus, faulty: first, only part of a totality is taken into account and is substituted for the whole, since it is the girl or the picture and not just the eyes or the chubby face on which an opinion or judgment is given; and, secondly, it is usually the least important part which is selected, or even an altogether irrelevant factor, since the meaning looked for is a matter entirely of private prejudice and is independent of the actual identity of the situation, person or object in which it is sought.

Attitudes and lack of understanding about what to look for corresponding to the above are dishearteningly rampant also in the field of education in art, though there one finds a great deal more subtlety, authority and thoroughness in the confusion. In this instance facts surrounding a work of art take the place of chubby faces and blue eyes, *i.e.*, historical and biographical details, the meanings of symbols used by an artist, the event, story or person depicted in a given painting, and so on—as revealed by the following, unfortunately typical, illustration. A lecture given as part of one of our universities' regular art-department programs had been announced under the title "American Art in Philadelphia." Color slides, very well taken, of famous Philadelphia architectural structures and of paintings and furniture were projected; dates and historical information were abundantly given in each instance—that one of the houses in Fairmount Park had been moved there from its original site on Letitia Street; that another is often referred to as Benedict Arnold's house, though in fact Arnold hardly lived in it but rented it to other people; that its roof is no longer the original roof; that Independence Hall used to be known as Government House; that the present tower replaces the original one which had burned down in the year such and such, and on and on in this vein. What might account for any of these buildings' being architectural art the audience was given

not the slightest indication; not a word directed the students' attention to the qualities expressed by the proportions or style or to originality or creative adaptation of material and of traditions. When, next, color slides of furnished rooms of the eighteenth century houses were projected, the lecturer assured his listeners, with knowledgeable references to other collections, that no finer examples of furniture could be found anywhere; but what was responsible for the merit he attributed to a particular highboy and why the Chippendale chairs deserved to be called "the finest" or what made them be of the Chippendale period were never even hinted at. And, as to the part of the lecture which dealt with paintings, the following instance will sum up the general trend of the presentation: a full-length portrait of Pat Lyon, which we were told was painted by the American artist John Neagle, was projected; the lecturer supplied dates and incidents pertaining to Neagle's life. And then, again with not a word about what might give that portrait any merit as art, let alone American art, we were apprised of the fact that although the sitter, Pat Lyon, was painted in the garb of a smith, he was a gentleman. And that he was a gentleman could be noted by three things: the shoes, the lecturer pointed out, which could be seen below the smith's apron were gentlemen's shoes; the piece of paper nailed to the side of the smith's bench and bearing (as an enlarged slide of that detail showed) a diagram of the Pythagorean proposition indicated that Pat Lyon knew geometry, proof again because knowledge of geometry was the mark of a gentleman; and what finally clinched the argument for his gentlemanliness was that he had had enough money to have had his portrait painted by Neagle. That slide went off, and others followed, and the very same sort of what passes for education in art went on. What is the point in mentioning this? It is simply to indicate what goes on in the name of "art education" and, consequently, what sort of thing we are going to try, *must* try, to undo.

### III

Let us now move on toward answering what we should look for in the work of the artist. To this end we shall con-



sider the various responses of a hypothetical, but plausible, group of people to a given eighteenth century Pennsylvania "Dutch" (or German\*) dowry chest (Plate 7). Our first subject, an interior decorator, enters a room and spots our chest. It is just what that customer of his would want for the rustic ensemble he has been hired to produce. This man sees of the chest that which feeds *his* interest, *i.e.*, an interest in financial return; and he looks, therefore, to see in the chest what would serve this end—its color-scheme, its pattern, its size, the possibility of reproducing it and the expense that that might incur. Or, if he is not merely commercially-minded but an artist in his own field, he might also discover in this chest ideas to develop as part of his own creative interior decorating. Nevertheless, it is still his own interest and not the interest of the piece that he sees.

Another person, a dealer in "Americana," comes into the room. He appreciates the rarity of the chest, and he examines it and wonders at its extraordinarily good state of preservation. This man sees the work of time on it and of the owners' use of it; but he does not, for that, see the work of the artist, for he sees what has happened only *to* the painting on the chest, not what happens *in* it.

Next, a Pennsylvania "Dutchman" comes in. And, oh, the thrill at the sight of the chest and the glow comes to his cheeks! For this chest is exactly like that chest he recalls so well up in Mom's room when he was a boy knee-high to a grasshopper living in Lehigh County. And how well he remembers how Mom was always after the kids for sitting on it! And his response to the chest? The emotion it releases is definitely *not* about this chest but about Mom's blanket chest that this one recalls to him; the emotion he feels is not, therefore, about the artist's work at all.

Our next visitor is a student of Pennsylvania "Dutch" lore. He might also be a decorator, a dealer or a Pennsylvania "Dutchman," but now as a student of Pennsylvania "Dutch" lore he sees and gets meanings according to his specific interest and knowledge in that field. He will, for example, note the patterning motifs, such as the star and the tulip, and recall their symbolic significance—the *hexefuss* star as a symbol

\* "Dutch" is a corruption of the German word "Deutsch."

reputed to ward off the evil spirit, the tulip as a symbol of longevity. He will know that the name on the chest is of the girl for whom it was ordered. And he will also be able to classify this chest as one originating from Lehigh County in Eastern Pennsylvania because of its having sunken panels between arches in relief (a feature of chests done at the end of the eighteenth century in that part of Pennsylvania). Does this man see the artist's work? No, he does not—not, anyhow, from art's point of view, since what he gets of the chest could be got just as well from a number of other Lehigh County chests and even also from modern, mechanistically produced imitations.

Now another student of Pennsylvania "Dutch" lore comes in. This one has delved more thoroughly into the field; his background of related material is broader, and his use of it is directed intelligently by his interest. He knows, for example, some predecessors to this chest, *viz*, the early Swiss chests (Plate 8). He notes, however, by setting what he observes of our chest against what his background supplies of knowledge of Swiss chests, that this chest is not at all florid or tending to be over-decorated as those Swiss chests are but that it has, rather, a certain reserve and a simplicity. He sets this up against something else in his background that has been stirred up by the chest—the fifteenth century Italian *cassone*, the color glow of which this chest recalls. But, again, the comparison reveals the sumptuous richness of actual gold leaf in the *cassone* and here a subdued, subtle warmth, rather than a glow, of the ivory background, which imparts a richness without detracting from the simplicity. And, as a matter of fact, this simplicity comes out now so clearly as being of this chest, as against the refined elegance and relative complexity of the *cassone*; and it is decorative rather than illustrative. And, as the student continues to experience and respond to the chest, what he registers of it connects also with what he knows of the Greek sarcophagi; yes, a sort of classic architectural character which is common to both, but here without the cold and monumental aspect of the sarcophagi and, instead, with a warmth and a hominess, clearly felt now by the contrast. The chest, too, brings to mind those early Egyptian tomb paintings and



mummy cases—decorated containers, in a way, as the chest also is. And what stirred up in him his memory of those early Egyptian things? He knows: for now, by way of that background knowledge guided by his interest in this chest, he sees in it a quality of color which partakes of the flat, earthy-bright areas of color of the Egyptians.

Does this person see the artist's work? To a great extent; for he is objective in his observations, and he perceives the chest in the light of a relevant background. We do not condemn the other responses illustrated; they are natural and normal. We do condemn them, however, whenever they are mistaken for an understanding of the work of the artist, as is so often the case in courses that purport to teach art-appreciation. True, it may be interesting to learn from the dealer in "Americana" just how rare, how valuable the chest is and to enjoy with him its remarkable state of preservation as this contributes to our sense of being freshly in touch with the past; but savoring of history and rarity, such as many lecturers on art indulge in, does not lead to understanding of the work itself, for that is not *of* that work but only *about* it. Or, in the company of the Pennsylvania "Dutchman" we may be excited and thrilled by the contagion of his emotions and go away with a sense of having really had an experience; but that experience is, again, not of the chest, nor in the classroom does an art teacher's subjective enthusiasm provide any basis for an experience of the painting under consideration. Our interior decorator has his parallel in the classroom, too—those lecturers who have some pet thesis in the proof and elaboration of which every work of art discussed is reduced to a mere argument; there is a seductive virtuosity in this exercise that imparts a compelling, if specious, sense of significance to it which is easily mistaken for the significance of the work of art so used, though, of course, the work itself has never actually been under examination. And our first student of Pennsylvania "Dutch" lore has a great deal to tell about the chest that may be interesting to know; he is comparable to the professors who identify for us the historical figure to whom the insignia on one of the men's coats in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* belonged, who tell us what the lily in an *Annunciation* or a peacock in

another religious painting symbolizes and which buildings provided the source of the background architecture in some primitive picture, and so on. But these revelations are the fruits of mere detective work, useful in the development of art-historians (who may pick them up and hand them on without ever having seen a painting) but of little or no help toward appreciation of art.

Nevertheless, there is this to note, that the ambassador's insignia, the lily, the turreted building and such have something to do with what the picture is as a picture; and, equally, here in the case of the chest the fact that it is a chest, that the motifs on it are of tulips, etc., that the name of the girl figures, that it is *this* name, that the influence of architecture is present — all of that has to do with what the artist has done; all those facts and features have a bearing on the character of his piece of work, since, whether imposed on him by tradition, custom or by the patron who commissioned him or whether he imposed them on himself by his free selection of them, they *are* there, and he used them.

But what a picture or the chest is from the point of what the artist has done owes its identity, its character, precisely to what the artist has done to and with such things as he used (chest, tulips, stars) which we may recognize factually or symbolically, what he has done, that is, that imparts to chest, tulips, stars, characteristics, qualities, which do not belong solely or even particularly to chest, tulip and star but which are what we consider *universal* attributes, *i.e.*, attributes having a broad human appeal and significance whether or not they belong to or appear in tulips or stars as we have thus far known these things. By universal attributes we mean qualities, properties, which all things in the reach of our senses possess for us — color, shape, location, degree of illumination. And these universal attributes are of broad human interest or value whenever they afford us the chance to respond to them for what they are and mean, whatever they might belong to, such attributes or qualities in the chest, for example, as related proportions, colorfulness, decorativeness, simplicity, a kind of sober variety, a center of interest held in by balancing, yet not identical, units (the qualities, that is, of order, balance and variety). In the



chest there is also a pervasive color tonality which binds the varied color-contrasts with a subdued, yet rich, almost glowing, overall effect enlivened by punctuating, clean-cut shapes as of silhouetted pressed leaves. The pattern of the organization of these shapes offers a character we associate with a dance, not as of a Pavlova fluidity or of a minuet daintiness but, rather, having something of the awkward grace of a county-fair dance. Further, because of what the artist has done to and with what we recognize as tulips, stars, we get also such broad human qualities as naïveté and a refined crudeness.

All these qualities are of broad human interest in the sense that we may respond to them anywhere. They do not belong necessarily to stars or tulips, nor do we particularly expect these qualities in stars or in tulips; they are, however, qualities which the units on the chest saying tulips and stars acquired and have now for us. And we get these qualities, the naïveté, for instance, in part because we recognize tulips we know but see them as tulips we have never known before, now flattened out in that pressed-leaf sort of pattern, black, gawky in outline, in shape and in proportions. That is, we get to see the identity of what the artist did when we see what he has done to and with what we recognize as tulips or shapes or colors, *i.e.*, what he has done that gives them meanings relatively independent of the meanings they may have as shapes, colors or objects. And these color-shapes and objects are thus enriched in terms of broad human qualities, specifically, by such characteristics of simplicity, naïveté, awkward grace, etc. that are there as a result of that artist's individual conception of tulips and of organized color-shapes.

That this had to be a chest, that it had to bear a particular girl's name and that possibly it had to include, too, the traditional Pennsylvania "Dutch" symbols of tulips and stars all stands in reference to what the artist has done in the same way the sitter does in reference to a portrait—as, for example, the sitter's eyes, nose, etc. stood in reference to the portrait painted by Monet (Plate 9) or the features of the man Don Galos to Goya's portrait (Plate 10) or the story of "The Woman of Samaria" to Tintoretto's painting *Christ and The Woman of Samaria* (Plate 1). The Monet or the Goya says

M. Cogneret or Don Galos because of the likely resemblance retained. But the result of what each artist did by the use of his medium to and with what says nose, eyes, flesh of M. Cogneret or Don Galos is what is embodied in the picture, here, now, whether it looks like the sitter or not—such broad human qualities, in the case of the Monet, as robustness and freshness and luminosity with, also, aliveness of surface-pattern which is part and parcel of a solid, bulky color-volume in three-dimensional space. These are characteristics of the picture painted by Monet, whether these qualities belonged or not to the sitter. And the picture of Don Galos by Goya, by way of Goya's use of his means, has, here, now, whether as a person Don Galos had them or not, such qualities as color-freshness and focalized drama. These are of the picture, of *its* color, *its* pattern, *its* organization, which we can enjoy as we respond to what we see that the artist has done, whether or not, again, we have any interest in or care to know anything about Don Galos. And in the case of the Tintoretto, whatever its title and whatever we may know that we recognize there of the story, the picture, the painted area, *its* make-up conveys such qualities and meanings as bigness, power, richness, mellowness, warmth, subtlety, balance of contrasts, movement of light reaching out to all parts, sweeps of volumes through deep space and so on, all of which we can get independently of the recognizable facts of its subject or story.

Now, back to the chest: what we see that the artist has done (flattened down tulips and caused them to dance about with an awkward grace and a naïveté) does not contribute to the practical purpose, that is, to the meaning of the chest as a chest; its color-scheme could be green and purple, its decoration could be divided into two instead of three panels, and it would still be, still mean the chest it is from the practical standpoint. But it is what the artist did that gives the object, practical or not, its universal appeal. And that, the result of what the artist did, reveals also certain aspects of the character of a group of people, the tradition to which that artist belonged. By its general characteristics his work reflects—provided, of course, we are able to refer it to relevant background knowledge on our part—



such features of the Pennsylvania "Dutch" people as their love for their home and the home objects, from their trinket boxes to their chests and their cupboards and to their barns; it reflects their love of and their feeling for decorativeness of a bold yet simple and naïve character. Moreover, while this chest is as "Dutch" as sauerkraut, it is also unique—again, something we can see only if we are able to test this chest against an adequate knowledge of such chests as a group. It is unique in the sense that it also conveys the broad human quality of individuality; that is, it is the objective embodiment of what *this* man did to and with the traditionally Pennsylvania "Dutch" bold, simple and naïve decorativeness—a decorativeness found in all such chests, but one that we get from no other chest than his in that or any tradition.

Compare this chest with another Pennsylvania "Dutch" chest (Plate 11). The second one is as much a chest, as good, as serviceable and as Pennsylvania "Dutch" a chest and as individual, as unique a chest as the chest we just studied. The individuality of this second chest results from what another man did to and with the "chestness" of the piece, the tradition, the girl's name, the traditional symbols, and so on. And it is obvious that he used everything, including the actual medium of paint and color, differently from the artist who painted the first chest. The result achieved consequently differs, too, in what it conveys of broad human qualities: for instance, while our second chest sends us back in the traditions to the same early Greek sarcophagi as the first one, it is not this time by way of any internal architectural feature but because of a block-like massiveness, a massiveness which has been reinforced by a stone-like character resulting from the painter's use of an overall grey tonality in his color-scheme. This color-scheme, however, is materially modified by the mottled surface resulting from the dappling manner of applying paint—an effect, by the way, rather frequently found in the work of the Pennsylvania "Dutch," for example, in their so-called spatter ware and in their finger-painted boxes and cupboards, as well as in other dowry chests. In the chest this mottling tempers the stonelike character with a feeling of fluidity, as fluidity char-

acterizes also the main linear motifs, the hearts, of the decoration. With all this fluid going-on, the piece presents an organization of parts that hold each other up in a balanced construction; it has an architecture, so to speak, due to the adaptation of what the artist had to use to what he was interested in achieving and in conveying of broad interest: note, for example, how for balance and picturesqueness he artificially hyphenated the owner's name and inserted it in the middle of the date (in the Lehigh County chest the girl's last name in the panel at the right is likewise hyphenated, in this case helping achieve a sense of unified variety with her first name as a counter-balancing element in the panel at the left); note also the integrating, constructive compositional relationships the artist established among the feet, the brasses and the decoration and the use he made of the dovetail pattern of the joined planks as containing bars to the rhythm of the decorative motifs.\*

In both these Pennsylvania "Dutch" chests, the chestness of the object (its having to be and to function as a specific kind of container) was taken into account. Not only was the functional aspect retained and not interfered with, but it is even pointed up by way of the architectural organization and the frontality of the decoration. And it is also enriched, differently in each chest, in sensuous appeal and broad human qualities on the same principle that the units which say eyes, nose, etc. of M. Cogneret and Don Galos in the Monet and Goya portraits were enriched sensuously and significantly, and also on the same principle that the story of "The Woman of Samaria" as we might know it as a biblical episode was given a new, specific identity in the Tintoretto painting. Stated differently, this means that in each case—chest, portrait, biblical episode—if it were not for what the artist did, all we would get would be the facts only of the episode or of the sitter's facial features, or, in the chests, the

\* There were usually two men responsible for such chests: first, what was called the "joiner," who built the wooden framework; and then the painter, who was given the wooden piece and the name and date to be put on and very possibly also which symbols to depict. Part of what the "joiner" gave the painter of our chest, besides the size and proportions of the piece, was the type of feet, the center support, and, also, the box-like shape of these early chests (just one step away from the mere box) with its lower row of drawers.



facts of six well-joined planks in the form of a lidded container, for that is all that is required for the object to be a chest. In these chests, however, and in these paintings, the wooden boxy container, the tulips, the stars and hearts, the eyes and noses of the sitters, the biblical story in each instance served as a point of departure for each artist to create an object, a new object—this chest, that one, this painting and that other one—which has its own, new characteristics, now richer, of broader human interest than at the original starting point, since these new characteristics, such as naïveté, boldness, drama, fluidity, robustness, freshness, power, and so on, reach beyond the meanings of the subject facts as facts—tulips and stars, faces, Christ and the woman of Samaria meeting at the well, *i.e.*, the facts from which they started and which they retain to some, to quite, an extent.

As these two different pieces of furniture say chests, so does a picture by Horace Pippin (Plate 12), the Negro artist from West Chester, Pennsylvania, tell the same biblical story as Tintoretto's *Christ and The Woman of Samaria*. The Pippin, however, as a result of what Pippin did to and with the facts of the same story, reaches a very different set of human values—an intensity of color drama, a stark vividness, a clarity of space, a sense of naïveté. In both the Tintoretto and the Pippin we are told the subject facts, we recognize the story if we know it, and we get so much more which we cannot get from the facts of the story alone or from the same story told or presented by someone else. What we get is what the picture has or is or says here, now; and we respond in the case of the Pippin and Tintoretto relatively independently of our interest in the story. Similarly in these two chests, we see, we get the meaning of tulips, stars and hearts and then also more than that; we get something that just tulips, stars and hearts, or else tulips, stars and hearts presented by another person, do not have and which we can respond to and appreciate relatively independently of our interest in the thing as a chest or in the recognizable tulips, stars and hearts. Of each instance we may then say that characteristics that refer us to and indicate the point of departure are now, have become, of broader human interest by

way of the painter's individuality, *his* feelings, *his* interest, *his* imagination; and we may then say further that each piece (picture, decorated chest) is the work of an artist not because it presents a likeness, a biblical event or supplies a serviceable object and recognizable items, but because each fulfills, is, what we find a work of art to be that we can verify in these—*i.e.*, “a fragment of life [here, tulips, hearts, faces, Christ, well, landscape] presented to us [there it is—those units, that story] enriched in meaning by the artist's insight, sensitivity, imagination, and creative spirit.”\*

\* Mary Mullen, *An Approach to Art*, The Barnes Foundation Press, 1923, p. 5.









El Greco

*Annunciation*



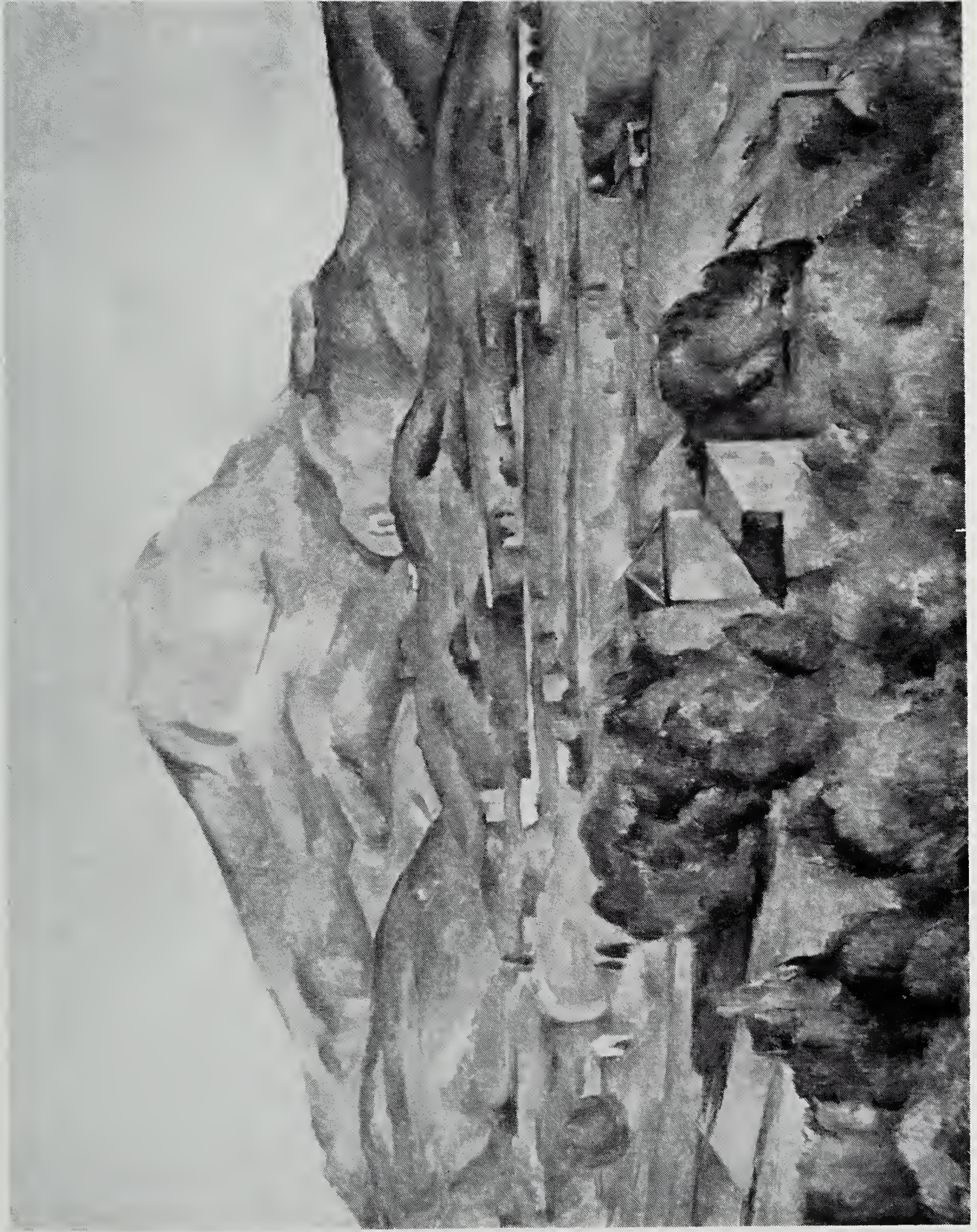




PLATE 4

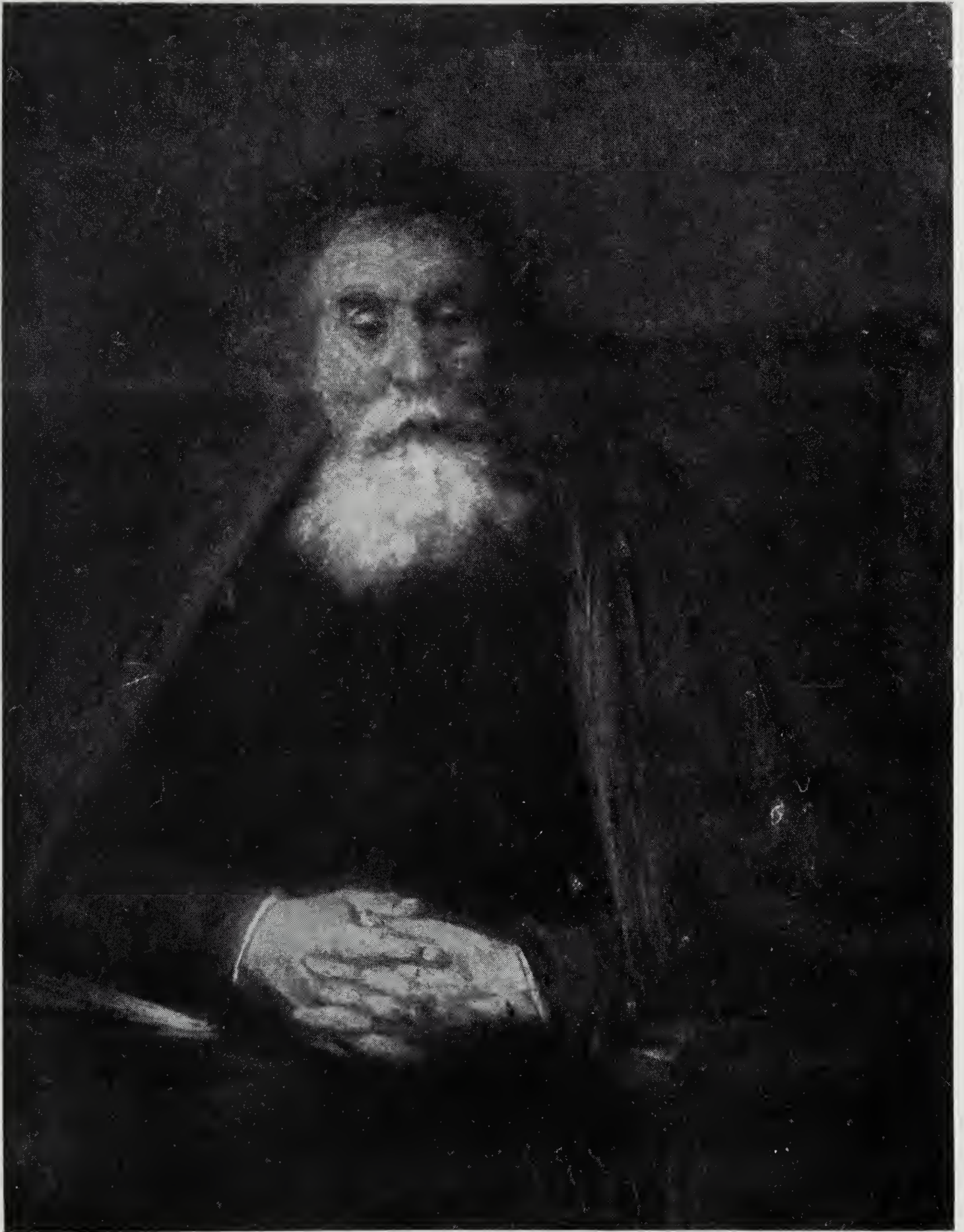


Soutine

*Woman with Hat*



PLATE 5



Rembrandt

*Portrait of an Old Man*  
(Uffizi, Florence)



PLATE 6



Cézanne

*Madame Cézanne with Green Hat*





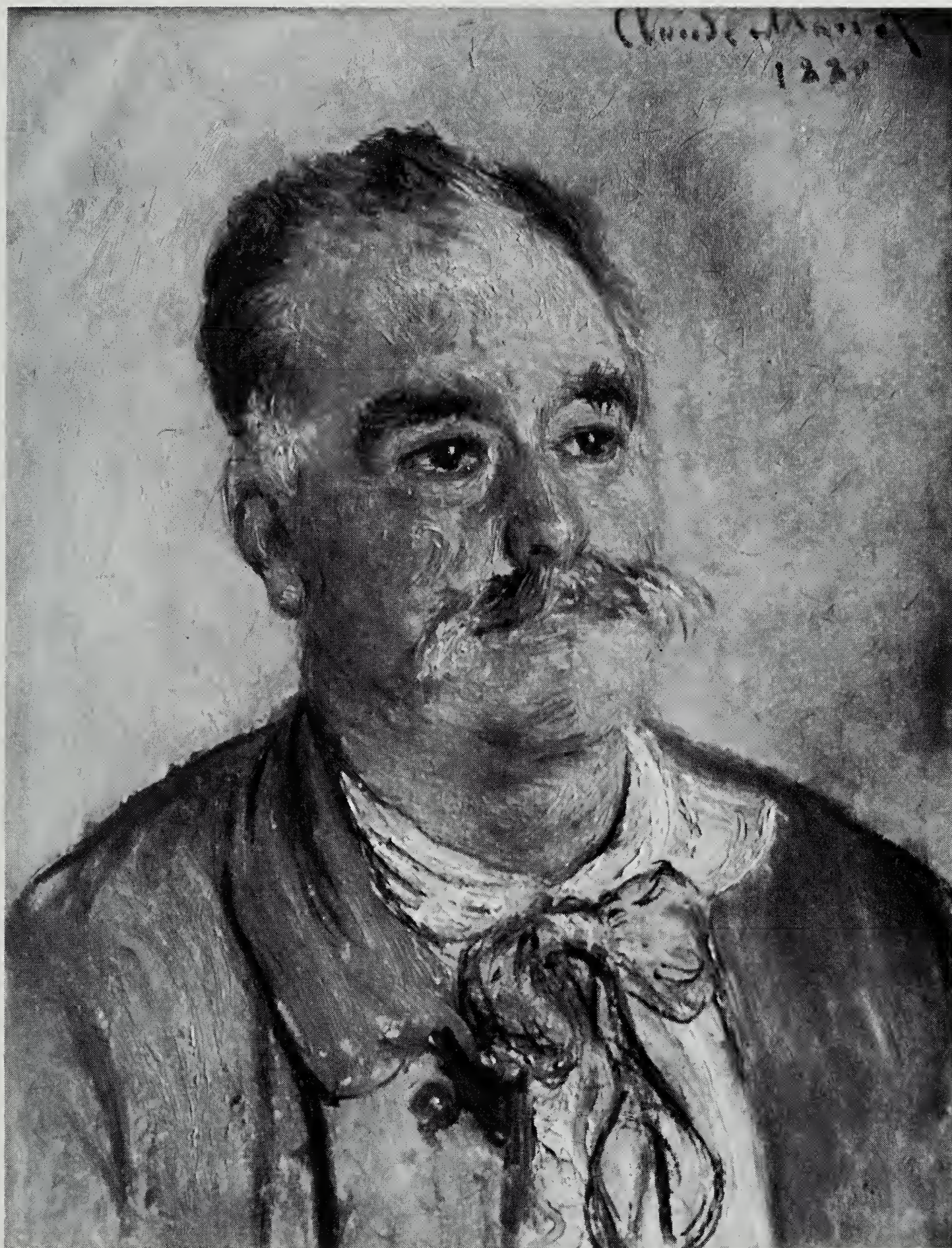
Pennsylvania "Dutch"

Dowry Chest









Monet

*M. Cogneret*



PLATE 10



Goya

*Portrait of Don Galos*

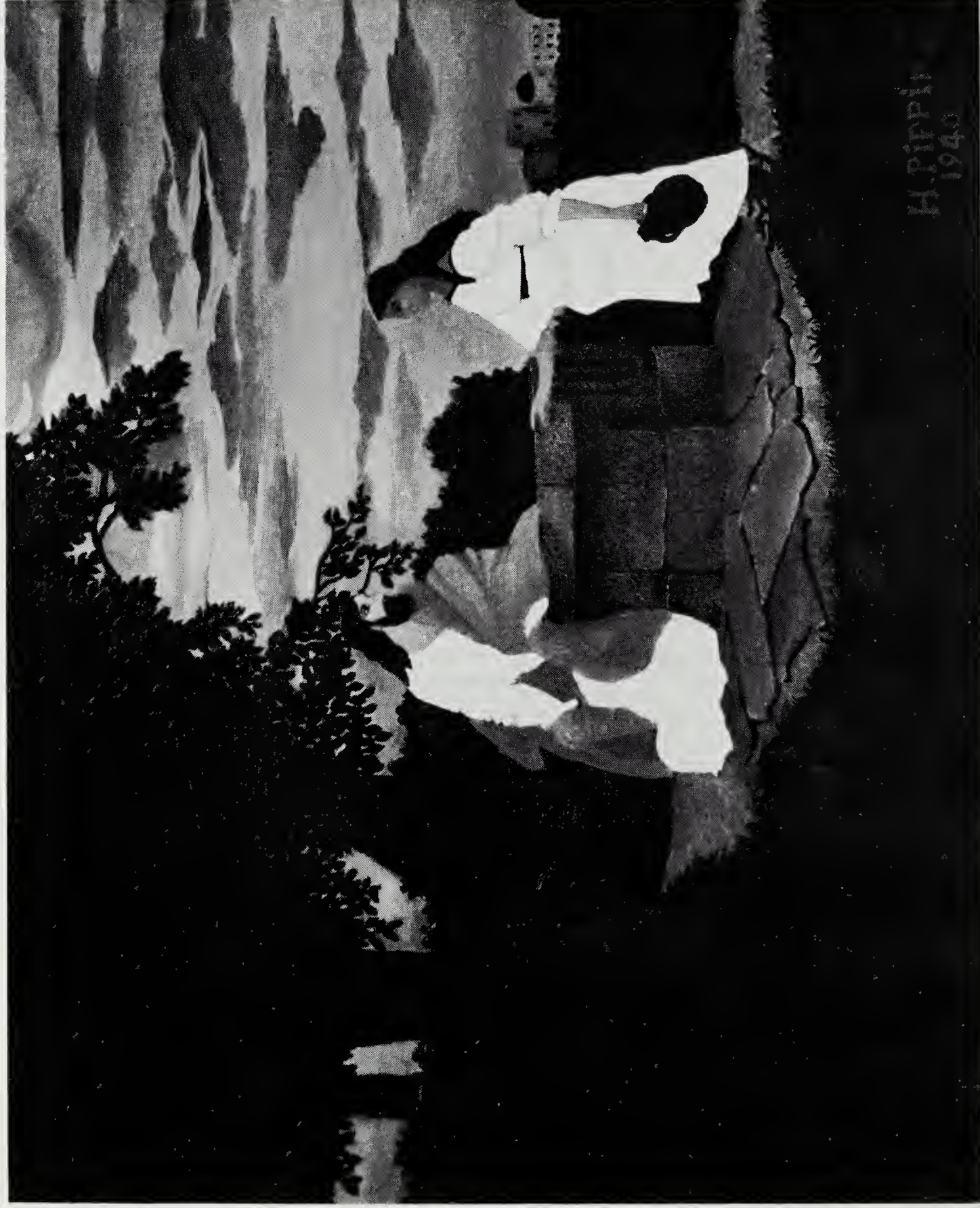




Pennsylvania "Dutch"

Dowry Chest







# The Case Method and The Barnes Method

by GIL CANTOR

As Martin Mayer points out in *The Lawyers*,\* modern legal education began in 1870, when President Eliot of Harvard hired as a professor of law a New York lawyer named Christopher Columbus Langdell.

In his first year at the law school Professor Langdell developed what is called the "case method" of teaching law, the method which replaced the teaching of abstractions and rules of law (so-called "black-letter law") with the analysis of judicial opinions in actual specific cases.

Langdell published his first "casebook," *Cases on Contracts*, in 1871. As the case method replaced the teaching of black-letter law, the casebook (an organized collection of reported decisions in a particular field of law) supplanted the textbook as the primary tool of law teaching.

The presuppositions of the case method, as gleaned from its protagonists, were basically four:†

1. *Scientific*. The case method was intended as a "scientific" method of teaching law. Langdell asserted that the law library was the proper workshop of law professors and students. "It is to us all what the laboratories of the university are to the chemists and physicists, the museum of natural history to the zoologists, the botanical garden to the botanists." Another commentator described the case method as "an extremely early attempt to apply the inductive method of the laboratory to matters foreign to the natural sciences."

The "scientific" argument is in a high degree rhetorical, utilizing a word that was and remains a persuasive one. It ignores the normative or prescriptive element in a rule of law as compared with the merely descriptive. Neverthe-

\* Harper & Row (New York, 1966), p. 80.

† As summarized in Patterson, Edwin W., "The Case Method in American Legal Education: Its Origins and Objectives," 4 *Journal of Legal Education* 1 (1951).



less, it serves at least to convey the important fact that the student is going to the "original sources" of the law as opposed to secondary sources such as textbooks.

2. *Pedagogical*. As explained by Patterson:\* "The chief pedagogical presupposition of the case method was that students learn better when they participate in the teaching process through problem-solving than when they are merely passive recipients of the teacher's solutions." Further, while there has never been complete agreement on these principles, the following have been widely regarded as proper corollaries of the case method: (a) the student's participation in classroom discussion; (b) the treatment of the cases studied not as illustrative of definitions and principles expounded by the teacher, but as original sources from which the student is to derive his own generalizations; (c) the inclusion in casebooks of "bad" cases as well as "good" ones, in order to stir the student to independent thinking; and (d) the stricture that the teacher should merely put questions and hypothetical cases to the student, but should not provide a summary of the legal rules or principles to be derived from the cases.

3. *Pragmatic*. It was frequently maintained that the case method trained law students to make judgments on concrete facts, as lawyers have to do. In learning to extract law from facts, the student prepares himself for the practice of law and learns the nature of the judicial process.

4. *Historical*. It was assumed, finally, that the study of cases enables the student to grasp the historical development of the law. Langdell expressed the historical assumption thus:

Each of these doctrines [of the law] has arrived at its present state by slow degree; in other words, it is a growth, extending in many cases through centuries. This growth is to be traced in the main through a series of cases; and much the shortest and best, if not the only way of mastering the doctrine effectually is by studying the cases in which it is embodied.

And J. C. Gray, a great law teacher, contended that the casebook "accustoms the student to consider the law not

\* *Op. cit.*



merely as a series of propositions . . . having only a logical interdependence, but as a living thing, with a continuous history, sloughing off the old, taking on the new."

Although nearly all American law schools have adopted the case method, at least in its general outlines, it would be misleading to suggest that the shift to the case method occurred easily or without heated controversy.

It is reported\* that, in order to secure the adoption of the case method at Columbia in 1890, President Seth Low had to fire half the faculty. The late Judge Jerome Frank, known as a "legal realist," blasted Langdell in 1947 with the comment that "American legal education went badly wrong some seventy years ago when it was seduced by a brilliant neurotic."

It should be noted, though this is not the place for their evaluation, that there have been serious and important criticisms of the case method—some based on notions of jurisprudence, some pedagogical, others frankly political. Moreover, even in its hour of triumph the method was already undergoing changes, some of which were corrective, others of which threatened its basic assumptions. In recent years, the case method has had increasingly to make allowances for other kinds of training, such as accounting, legislative drafting, and collective-bargaining negotiation.

Nevertheless, without attempting a full or final evaluation of the case method and without essaying to project its future role in legal education, two observations should be made. The first is that the case method served to shift legal education from the general to the specific, from the abstract to the concrete, thus making it more realistic. And the second is that it revealed the law to be a "process" involving continual creation and re-creation and, therefore, part of life, rather than a set of static principles, given, permanent and lifeless.

The study of law may helpfully be compared with the painting of a whale. After describing, in *Moby Dick*, how inaccurately whales have been depicted by artists ("it looks more like the tapering of an anaconda, than the broad palms of the true whale's majestic flukes") and by naturalists

\* Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 84.



("this unsightly whale looks much like an amputated sow"), Melville offers this explanation:

Consider! Most of the scientific drawings have been taken from the stranded fish; and these are about as correct as a drawing of a wrecked ship, with broken back, would correctly represent the noble animal itself in all its unlashd pride of hulls and spars. Though elephants have stood for their full-lengths, the living Leviathan has never yet floated himself for his portrait. The living whale, in his full majesty and significance, is only to be seen at sea in unfathomable waters.

And further:

But it may be fancied that, from the naked skeleton of the stranded whale, accurate hints may be derived touching his true form. Not at all. For it is one of the more curious things about this Leviathan, that his skeleton gives very little idea about his general shape.

The study of black-letter law was like the painting of a beached whale or, worse, its skeleton. The case method, however imperfectly, goes after the creature where he lives. For, "the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a-whaling yourself."

The case method of teaching law was embroiled in major controversy for about forty-five years after its introduction. If Dr. Barnes' method of teaching the philosophy and appreciation of art, as first propounded in *The Art in Painting* is to run a similar course, perhaps we may soon celebrate the conclusion of its forty-five year travail.

Barnes, like Langdell, substituted the analysis of particular cases (paintings) for the teaching of abstractions (aesthetic theory). "[The method] stipulates that an understanding and appreciation of paintings is an experience that can come only from contact with the paintings themselves."\*

The collection which Barnes assembled at The Barnes Foundation served for the study of the art in painting the same purpose as Langdell's *Cases on Contracts* served for the study of contract law. The paintings are assembled, like the judicial opinions in a legal casebook, in significant and

\* Barnes, Albert C., *The Art in Painting*, Harcourt, Brace and Company (New York, 1937), p. x.



provocative groupings. Even inferior works, like the "bad" cases, were acquired and retained by Barnes for their educational value.

The presuppositions of the case method, summarized above, have their counterparts in those of The Barnes Foundation. Thus:

1. *Scientific.*

The scientific ideal . . . is that of complete objectivity. . . . Science, in short, by excluding the individual's whims and fantasies from the determination of what objectively exists, has made the physical world infinitely more amenable to the individual's enlightened purposes. . . .

A similar passage from dreams to reality in the world of art can be made only by the same means—the use of method based upon objective fact.\*

Dr. Barnes, wrote Miss de Mazia, "believed that the approach to aesthetics should be as disciplined and methodical as the approach to physics or chemistry."†

2. *Pedagogical.* The course of instruction at The Barnes Foundation involves, like a case-method course in law school: (a) the student's participation in classroom discussions (the Socratic method prevails in both experiences); (b) the treatment of the paintings as original sources from which the student derives his generalizations ("it is not assumed that the conclusions reached with regard to particular paintings are the only ones compatible with the use of the method: any one of them is of course subject to revision"‡); and (c), as noted above, inferior paintings ("bad" cases) are included for their educational value.

3. *Pragmatic.* While the law student is, in most cases, preparing himself for the practice of law, for which the case method has certain advantages, the educational purposes of The Barnes Foundation are much broader: "All our efforts are in the direction of teaching students how to learn to see—that is, to perceive the aspects of everyday life that are significant from the standpoint of their broad human

\* Barnes, Albert C. and de Mazia, Violette, "Method," *Art and Education*, The Barnes Foundation Press (Merion, Pa., 1969), p. 15.

† de Mazia, "An Experiment in Educational Method at The Barnes Foundation," *Art and Education*, *supra*, p. 134.

‡ Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, *supra*, p. xi.



values.”\* Nevertheless, the educational method is adapted to that larger goal: “There is no substitute for this type of activity, . . . *shared* activity—that is, students are encouraged to discuss freely problems raised by art, and by life itself, of which art is just a part.”†

4. *Historical.* Corresponding to the teaching of the historical development of the law is the Barnes Foundation’s emphasis on the traditions of painting: “In this book [*The Art in Painting*] an effort is made to trace in the history of painting the essential continuity of the great traditions and to show that the best of the modern painters use the same means, to the same general ends, as did the great Florentines, Venetians, Dutchmen and Spaniards.”‡ Again: “No tradition has ever completely disappeared.”§

While the analogies are imperfect and ought not to be pressed too far, they do have a significance. At the very least, I suppose they show why lawyers frequently find the course of instruction at The Barnes Foundation to be congenial in the methodological aspect. At the most, they remind us that there is a point at which the creative analysis of cases, in law practice as well as law school, and the creative analysis of paintings, can be described in the same terms. As stated by Barnes and de Mazia:

The extremely literal-minded or habit-bound can take in a situation only if it repeats practically point for point one already encountered. . . .

At the other extreme are those who can detect very slight resemblances and in so doing discover the indispensable clue to the solution of a problem. All interpretation of really formidable novelty requires this ability to discriminate between the essential and the adventitious, and to carry away from experience a grasp of generalized connections applicable to innumerable things which need have no obvious common quality.||

Genuine experience in reasoning and in artistic creation

\* de Mazia, “An Experiment in Educational Method at The Barnes Foundation,” *Art and Education*, *supra*, p. 138.

† *Ibid.*, p. 139.

‡ Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, *supra*, p. xi.

§ *Ibid.*, p. x.

|| Barnes and de Mazia, “Experience and Growth,” *Art and Education*, *supra*, p. 181.



is a continuous process, each using the problems which arise and the material furnished by the past as food for an ever-renewed growth, and resulting in a constant reorganization both in the individual and in the world.\*

That is where the parallel lines meet.

\* *Op. cit.*, p. 183



# Dawn

*by* JERRY GOLDSMITH\*

What do ya see, boy, what do ya see?  
Fences, I see gray weather-worn, splintery, cracked and  
twisted, leaning, bending, mended, fences.  
But what do ya see, boy, what do ya see?  
A dusty road, yellow dirt, trash and scum, broken glass  
in ruts, timeworn dragging feet, shadowed feet, bare,  
cut, care-not feet.  
But what do ya see, boy, what do ya see?  
Flies, flies, bright colored flies, fat and swollen, buzzing,  
humming, swiftly swirling, dancing and whirling,  
faster, spinning faster, round and round, creeping  
crawling garbage can, rusty leaking can, is what I see.  
No, no! Look up, boy, now what do ya see?  
A bus, a bus, all covered with dust and rust and flies and  
smells of fish raw and cooked, and the man from the  
farm drives the bus, "Got berries today, big berries  
today."  
But what do ya see, boy, what do ya see?  
I see a dirty window won't come down, hot sticky arms  
packed in all around, sweat from my brow pourin'  
down, gettin' in my eyes.  
Open your eyes, boy open your eyes and tell me what do  
ya see?  
Nothin' to see, mister, nothin' to see, just the sun, burns  
my eyes in the morning.  
That's it, boy! It's dawn. Ain't it beautiful? Can't ya see?

\* Alumnus of the Art Department



# An Exploration in Esthetics

## Five Aspects of Two Shakespearean Plays\*

*by* PATRICIA NEUBAUER

THE furniture maker must design furniture which, besides being pleasing to our eyes, fulfills a utilitarian function. The architect must plan his building not only to gratify our senses but also to serve the demands of its particular use. If these things are so, what then about the playwright? What demands are placed on him?

First of all, the playwright must provide entertainment. To entertain means to engage the attention; that which entertains turns aside our attention from something else and focuses it upon itself. One can be entertained without being moved, one can be entertained without being intellectually involved, but one cannot be entertained without the interest being tickled. To a certain extent people may be lured into the theater by means of favorable critical reviews, by appeal to their sense of fashion; but in the end if people are not entertained, they simply do not go.

Without an audience there can be no theater. A playwright does not write a play as a novelist writes a book. A play is written to be performed, and, if the performance is not entertaining, it is not given again. This was as true for London of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as it is for the theater of today. Shakespeare was a popular and commercial success in his own day. He retained his popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His plays still entertain modern audiences.

If successful entertainment is the first demand upon the playwright, there are yet additional demands placed upon the artist-playwright: his work must have unity and variety; and the elements of illustration, decoration and expression must be present and must be achieved by means which lie within the limits of his medium—language spoken, heard

\* Adapted from Seminar talk



and comprehended. It is true that movement, gesture, music, costumes and scenery all enhance the pleasure of attending a play and function as an aid to our comprehension. However, these are accessories contributed by other arts; subtract the language and one has a mime or a ballet, not a play.

I shall attempt to show that Shakespeare fulfills the principles of unity and variety and that he also balances the elements of illustration, decoration and expression—perhaps more equally than any other playwright of the English language. I have chosen to use *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* as examples.

#### SUBJECT, SUBJECT-MATTER AND EXPRESSION

The subject is the artist's starting place, his point of departure. It is something existing outside of himself which he has perceived and reacted to. Having chosen a subject, the artist finds that it must be altered and adjusted, subtracted from and added to if it is to serve his design. Without this manipulation and organization of material the subject will be useless for the purposes of expressing his meaning and recording his experience.

When I say Shakespeare's subject was thus and so, I am suggesting something that is plausible rather than a documented fact. We have none of Shakespeare's letters or journals, nor have we a contemporary biography of him. Records exist for his baptism, marriage and death. We know he was a professional actor and held shares in the company for which he acted and wrote. We know also that he was successful enough in his career to buy real estate in Stratford. But this is all; beyond this everything is guesswork, but guesswork built upon knowledge of his plays and the Elizabethan era.

What was Shakespeare's starting point for *The Tempest*? *The Tempest* was written in approximately 1611. Several years earlier nine ships of colonists set out from England to the Virginia colony. During the voyage the fleet encountered a hurricane, and the ship carrying the leader of the expedition, Sir George Somers, and the Lt. General of



Virginia, Sir Thomas Gates, was separated from the rest and wrecked upon the then uninhabited Bermudas. The crew and passengers remained on the island for nine months before they finally made their way to Virginia. During their stay dissension broke out between Somers and Gates, and the group was split into two factions (consider the implied contest between Prospero and his brother for power and the plotting of Antonio and Sebastian against the King of Naples). Before these two parties sailed off to Virginia two of their number, who had been convicted of crimes and were prisoners, escaped and remained alone on the island. The next time a Virginia Company ship touched the island, they persuaded a third man to join them. These three called themselves "The Three Kings of Bermuda" and ruled in solitary splendor without subjects. They found a great lump of ambergris and quarrelled over it. Their reign and their civil war came to an end when the trading company took possession of the Bermudas and the ambergris (perhaps this is one of the sources for Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban).

These incidents became the talk of London town; they were discussed at large and written about in pamphlets and were certainly known to Shakespeare. The Bermudas, which had previously been thought enchanted and dangerous, were described minutely; the flora, fauna, geography and savages of the New World were all intensely interesting to the English. The Elizabethans believed in witches, devils and the miraculous feats of magicians. (Thus, Caliban, Prospero, Ariel and conjured tempests all pleased contemporary fancy, having emerged quite naturally out of the environment in which Shakespeare lived.) Presumably, too, *The Tempest* was to be presented in celebration of a royal betrothal, and recognition of this marriage-to-be had in some way to be included in the subject. And, finally, previous characters created by Shakespeare were also used as part of the subject: Puck was predecessor to Ariel, Polonius to Gonzalo.

Very well, Shakespeare had chosen his subject, but this was not enough material on which to build a play. He had to construct an armature on which to put his clay. He had to invent characters, and, having invented characters, he



had to create a plot of action in which his characters could find definition. Plot of action is the environment in which characters move and develop. What are Miranda, Prospero, Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano outside the play? They are mere names in a list of *dramatis personæ*. It is only when they move within the play, reacting to situations and to one another, that they achieve dimension and definition.

Now, as these characters come into being and begin to breathe, as the landscape of the play begins to take form, something happens to the playwright. He begins to interact with his creations; he begins to move within the geography of scene and action; he begins to experience. A meaningfulness emerges which he must express in terms which will be meaningful to his audience.

Shakespeare says, in effect, I have experienced the world as a magical, wondrous place, and I must show that aspect of it to you. This world is not a never-never land but the very one in which you eat your breakfast, read your morning paper and go to the dentist. There is really nothing here you do not know, else it would be without meaning for you.

Miranda says:

O, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,

That has such people in't.

(*The Tempest* Act V, Scene 1)

To what does Miranda's speech give expression? She gives expression to her own experience; she has been confronted with a vastly new world. The speech is expressive of the experience of Shakespeare's times; the Renaissance, the discovery of America did create new worlds, figuratively and actually. The speech recalls to us the wonder that we, too, have felt when we stood upon the threshold of discovery.

Shakespeare chose his subject from among things that were interesting to the audience he knew, and it is part of the responsibility of the playwright to choose a subject familiar and interesting to his audience. The people would have gone to see the play even had it been a bad play just because it was about magic and enchanted islands. But it was not a



bad play, and today's audiences still go to see it and are satisfied. We are not attracted by the subject in the same way as the Elizabethans; we do not believe in magic, at least not of that kind; we do not look upon the Bermudas as wild and bewitched. We go to see the play the first time and are entertained, and we return to see it again and again because it is expressive of broad human values. By going beyond temporal and individual values to enter the realm of the eternal and universal, Shakespeare has pointed out the commonality of human experience and evoked from a great variety of men a parallel response.

What were the points of departure for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the second play to be discussed? From his youth Shakespeare must have been familiar with the Forest of Arden, a wild, heavily wooded tract in Warwickshire. As a child he must have believed it to be the scene of fairy revels. Also, he was familiar with the tales of Ovid and Chaucer. Again, he was called upon to prepare a play in celebration of an important marriage. He was submerged in the theater of his time and well aware of the extravagances and excesses that provided rich material for satire—even his own plays; “Pyramus and Thisbe” is a burlesque of *Romeo and Juliet*.

And so, all these elements are adjusted, altered, moved around, added to, subtracted from. The forest of Arden is transplanted to Greece, characters are created to move within its shadows, and fairies are taught to behave like Olympians—all this so that Shakespeare can present the gay, illogical, lunatic, unpredictable aspect of love. When Puck says, “What fools these mortals be,” he refers not only to Lysander, Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, Titania and Bottom, but also to you and to Shakespeare.

I have assigned definite themes to each of the plays: for *The Tempest*, the world is a wondrous place; for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, “reason and love keep little company together” (Bottom's own words). These themes are central and dominant ideas only; there are many other meanings—as many as there are perceptive people who have read or seen the plays. Meanings also change as times change, and meanings vary with the backgrounds that each of us brings to Shakespeare. They vary as each creative actor or director



changes stress and emphasis. Either of these plays, especially *The Tempest*, might have been entitled *As You Like It*.

### THE DECORATIVE ASPECT

Color, shape and pattern are the means the painter uses to achieve decorative effects. But the poet-playwright, appealing to our auditory sense rather than to our sense of vision, must employ devices which entertain the ear. The human ear delights in patterns of sound, especially in patterns of sounds that are repeated. Alliteration, assonance, rhyme are the means by which the poet accomplishes repetition of patterns of sound.

Alliteration means the repetition of identical or similar consonant sounds in close succession. The first example, two lines from Quince's prologue to "Pyramus and Thisbe," is so obvious and unrestrained in its use of alliteration that it not only illustrates alliteration but also demonstrates the extent to which alliteration ought not to go. It presents the quality of a windstorm rather than a suicide. The alliteration is more or less mere decoration; it does not heighten the meaning of the words.

Whereat with blade, with bloody blameful blade,  
He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast;  
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act V, Scene 1)

In a second example the alliteration is less obvious, more restrained:

The rude sea grew civil at her song,  
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres  
To hear the sea maid's music.  
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act II, Scene 1)

(If you think this is not ear-tickling, read it softly to your cat and watch her ears.) Here the sibilance not only pleases the ear but reproduces the music of the gently swishing sea. Unlike the above, it enhances and embellishes meaning and therefore goes beyond mere decoration.

Assonance is another kind of repeated sound. It is the



repetition of similar or identical vowel sounds in close succession. Be careful not to confuse it with rhyme. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" is assonance. "Lake and fake" are rhymes, but "lake and fate" are assonance. In this excerpt from a Titania speech notice the repetition of the long "i," the short "a" and the Latin long "a." Also hear how assonance is closely entwined with alliteration.

And in the spiced Indian air, by night,  
Full often hath she gossiped by my side;  
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,  
Marking the embarked traders on the flood.  
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act II, Scene 1)

Rhyme is the most familiar device of repetitive sound. It creates an expectation and satisfies that expectation. A word is heard, and the hearer knows that within a given space of time he will hear the sound repeated with variation. (This in itself is a simple but good example of unity and variety.) Rhyme is so universally understood and enjoyed for its decorative values that I do not wish to explore it further in this respect. However, I would like to point out a few of its functions beyond its decorative one. One must always remember that poetry came long before printing, that one hears poetry long before one reads poetry. We moderns are so inundated with the printed word that it has become our habit to visualize poetry as black geometrical patterns on white paper. But the ancients did not, and the illiterate do not, visualize printed poetry. They hear poetry. As well as facilitating memorization, rhyme, in conjunction with meter, gives shape and unity to the poet's ideas. It indicates the end of a line or the pattern of a stanza to the ear. In Shakespeare rhyme is often used as final punctuation, as a curtain falling at the end of a scene or at the end of a play. *The Tempest* ends with this rhyming couplet:

As you from crimes would pardoned be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.

To carry this point to its extremity, I use Shakespeare's own epitaph as example:



Good friend, for Jesus sake forbear  
To dig the dust enclosed here;  
Blest be the man that spares these stones,  
And curst be he that moves these bones.

Yet another way of creating repetition of sound is by rhythm and meter. Rhythm implies alternation: something is here, then it is replaced by something else, then the first thing returns. When we speak, we speak rhythmically: loud, soft, loud; fast, slow, fast; accented syllables, unaccented syllables, accented syllables. Meter is the regular or nearly regular occurrence of similar rhythmic patterns. In music 1-2-3 is a rhythmic pattern, but 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3 is three-quarter time, or a waltz. The three-quarter time is meter. In general, prose has rhythm; poetry has meter. The poet achieves meter through a variety of means both qualitatively and quantitatively. For our purposes it is unnecessary to investigate the difference between one meter and another. One is intuitively aware of metered lines when one hears them, and one is also sensitive to varieties of meter when they change from one kind to another.

Now, besides repetition of sounds and patterns of sounds a poet has other means of entertaining the ear. He may use onomatopoeia, euphony and cacophony. Onomatopoeia is the use of words the sounds of which suggest their meaning—words like “swish,” “clatter,” “clank,” “squeak.” Euphony is pleasant, sweet sound. It requires combinations of sounds or sequences of sounds that are easy to say.

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows  
Quite over canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act II, Scene 1)

This is euphony, and it is not difficult to imagine how the poet can translate sweet flowers into sweet sound; but suppose he speaks of bow-legged, long-eared hound dogs. Can you imagine quite as easily how they can be translated into harmonious, sweet sound?



My love shall hear the music of my hounds.  
 Uncouple in the western valley: let them go:  
 Dispatch, I say, and find the forester.  
 We will, fair queen, up to the mountain's top,  
 And mark the musical confusion  
 Of hounds and echo in conjunction.

. . . . .

My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,  
 So flew'd, so sanded; and their heads are hung  
 With ears that sweep away the morning dew;  
 Crook-knee'd, and dew-lapp'd like Thessalian bulls;  
 Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells  
 Each under each.

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act VI, Scene 1)

Cacophony is opposite to euphony. Here are discord, harsh sounds, clusters of consonants which are difficult to say smoothly or rapidly.

In pointing out these devices by which the decorative element of language is expressed I have, except in the case of rhyme, passed over the other functions which alliteration, assonance, etc. can perform. All of them can achieve a great deal more than the entertainment of the ear. They are also used in the service of illustration and expression, to contribute to unity and to bring about variety. However, I should like to suggest this point concerning decorative language—that there are certain lines and passages which, when spoken in performance, are of such strong decorative value that one does not and cannot hear every word in isolation or think out its meaning or significance. And if one strains to do so, one will forfeit that very pleasure that the playwright intended him to have.

Except for rhyme and meter, all of these so-called decorative devices are applicable to prose as well as to poetry. All of the examples I have chosen to use as illustration of various points have been poetic in form. Both plays are essentially verse plays, but within them are prose speeches. And the question is, why is prose used at all? What purpose is served by its use?

The opening scene of *The Tempest* is entirely in prose.



This scene is a more or less naturalistic representation of the tension aboard a ship caught in a dangerous storm. One would hardly expect mariners about to be shipwrecked, about to perish, to be speaking in meter. Besides, storms impose their own rhythm upon those caught up in them. Storms cannot be conducted according to measured beat. As well as providing us with information relevant to the plot of the play, the storm scene serves as a transition; it is the doorway that takes us through into the world of magic. It is rather a monument to the uncanny dramatic sense that was Shakespeare's: one goes into the theater out of the hurly-burly of the street and is immediately swept up in the urgency and excitement of a tempest where characters speak in the language and rhythms of everyday life. When the storm lets up, one, along with the characters, steps into the poetic environment of an exotic island. For the audience it is a very easy transition from market place to magic—an almost imperceptible transportation.

The clowns or comedians in both plays always speak in prose—Stephano and Trinculo in *The Tempest*, Bottom, Quince and Company in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. (Exception occurs when the latter perform their play, which of course is in verse; verse in those days was the acceptable form for tragedy.) I checked at random three other Shakespearean plays and found that the comics always speak in prose—the grave diggers in *Hamlet*, the gate keeper in *Macbeth*, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in *Twelfth Night*, and I kept wondering what advantage prose had over poetry. Then it occurred to me that comedians have their own rhythm and cadence which are individual to themselves and to their art: they play either instinctively or by long practice according to audience reaction; they must be free to pause, to invent, to improvise. Imposed meter would be crippling to the comedian's art.

### THE ILLUSTRATIVE ASPECT

Illustration comes from the Latin *illustrare*, which means to bring to light, to make clear. Frequently we use the word in the sense of giving palpable form to a concept. In the arts illustration reveals facts about the subject and the sub-



ject-matter; it lights up the artist's creative and esthetic experience. Illustration must be given through the means that lie within the limits of the artist's medium.

The thing that makes the greatest difference between illustration in painting and illustration in playwriting is the element of time. In painting, facts given about the subject must crystallize the meaning of the subject at a particular moment. In a given painting there can only be one such moment: one infers that something has happened before that moment and that something will happen after that moment; but only that particular moment can be represented on the canvas. When I think of this arrested movement of a moment which can be represented on a canvas, a certain Degas painting comes to mind: the jockey has just pulled upon his reins; the horse has transferred his weight to the hind legs to check momentum preparatory to pivoting his body to take a new direction.

Now, the dramatist has not one moment but many such moments and, so, can illustrate his subject at various times. Not only can these various moments re-enforce one aspect of the character, but also they can illustrate the character in totally different aspects relative to the overall unity of character or play structure.

The playwright has several means by which he can achieve literary illustration. One means is the structure of the play as a whole, the composition of events and the development of plot and action. Another means is language: his characters may move and gesture, may look the part, but these things are mere props, additions contributed by the actor's art; ultimately, it is the playwright's language which must move, gesture and sound the part. Juliet is not often acted by a charmingly pretty, fourteen-year old girl; she is more frequently played by a woman over thirty, who may or may not be appealing. In Shakespeare's own day she was acted by a boy. The naïve grace of a very young girl must be written into Juliet's style of speech.

Before Caliban makes his first entrance we have been told very little about him. We know that he is slave to Prospero (but then so, too, is Ariel), and we know that he is the offspring of a witch. Prospero uses two words, "tor-



toise" and "earth," in his reference to Caliban, and these two words give us a clue. (In opera the parallel example to this might be the playing of the theme identified with Tosca prior to her entrances.) Prospero does not say, "Here comes a monster." Instead, Caliban's speech illustrates his monstrosity:

As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd  
 With raven's feather from unwholesome fen  
 Drop on you both! A south west blow on ye  
 And blister you all o'er

This island's mine by Sycorax, my mother,  
 Which thou tak'st from me. When thou camest first  
 Thou strok'dst me and mad'st much of me; . . .  
 . . . and then I lov'd thee  
 And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,  
 The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place, and fertile.  
 Curst be I that did so! —All the charms  
 Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats light on you!

(*The Tempest* Act I, Scene 2)

The harsh cacophony of the hissing (not sibilant), guttural consonants reflect the crabbed, shut-in qualities of Caliban's disposition. The line, "blister you all o'er" is almost not human articulation but an animal snarl. These dissonant lines must be spoken slowly or they cannot be spoken at all. Prospero's words "tortoise" and "earth" are fulfilled; the style, like the man, is laborious, slow; it cannot soar.

However, this is Caliban in one aspect, as Prospero's slave. Let us look at him from another angle. Let us see him in the aspect of Stephano's slave. He is still bestial; he is still slow and crabbed, but he has been bewitched by wine, has elected to change masters, and now he serves willingly.

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;  
 And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;  
 Show thee a jay's nest and instruct thee how  
 To snare the nimble marmozet; I'll bring thee  
 To clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee  
 Young scamels from the rock.

(*The Tempest* Act II, Scene 2)



The style is still Caliban's, but now the speech opens up, grows lighter and richer. Caliban even lifts his eyes high enough to see monkeys and birds' nests.

Ariel is almost Caliban's opposite. Whereas Caliban made his entrance on stage from a cave, Ariel materializes (if this word can be used in respect to Ariel) out of air.

All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail! I come  
To answer thy best pleasures; be't to fly,  
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride  
On curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task  
Ariel and all his quality.

(*The Tempest* Act I, Scene 2)

Assonance, euphony, alliteration make this speech easy to say swiftly, as Ariel moves. Here are our so-called decorative devices in the service of illustration. Shakespeare has made a mosaic of things and activities that are fluent: "to swim," "to dive," "to ride," "curl'd clouds," "fire"—water and wind are implied. The language illustrates the qualities of Ariel; it also expresses his willingness.

As Caliban has more than one aspect, so, too, has Ariel. A little later during the same dialogue with Prospero, Ariel becomes reluctant to work longer for his master. Now the language as well as the words illustrate Ariel's unwillingness:

Remember, I have done thee worthy service;  
Told thee no lies, made no mistakings, serv'd  
Without or grudge or grumblings: Thou didst promise  
To bate me a full year.

(*The Tempest* Act I, Scene 2)

The speech no longer flies willingly. It deliberately stands still.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when the mechanics present their play within a play, "Pyramus and Thisbe," they seek to illustrate not by the qualities of language but by the statement of facts. The prologue introduces props and characters so that there will be no mistaking what or whom they illustrate.



Prologue. Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show;  
 But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.  
 This man is Pyramus, if you would know;  
 This beauteous lady Thisbe is, certain.  
 This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth  
     present  
 Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers  
     sunder;  
 And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are  
     content  
 To whisper, at the which let no man wonder.  
 This man, with lanthorn, dog, and bush of  
     thorn,  
 Presenteth Moonshine;

Wall. In this same interlude it doth befall  
 That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;

. . . . .

Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so;  
 And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.

Lion. You, ladies, you, whose gentle hearts do fear  
 The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on  
     floor,  
 May now perchance both quake and tremble  
     here,  
 When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.  
 Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am  
 A lion-fell, nor else no lion's dam:

Moon. All that I have to say, is, to tell you that the  
 lanthorn is the moon; I, the man in the moon;  
 this thorn-bush, my thorn-bush; and this dog,  
 my dog.

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act V, Scene 1)

If you think that you are seeing a play of "Pyramus and Thisbe," this is mere illustration. If you remember that you are seeing mechanics as characters within a play put on a play, it is excellent illustration. Could Shakespeare have illustrated the naïveté and lack of imagination of his clowns better?



## UNITY AND VARIETY

Unity is the quality of oneness. It occurs when a number of parts have been organized and integrated into a whole which can no longer be separated into its component parts. Unity implies variety, but a variety in which there are harmonious relationships. Unity also implies economy, that there be no irrelevant, superfluous additions or inclusions.

The artist-playwright achieves overall structural unity chiefly by means of plot or by means of character development.

The plot is a planned series of interrelated actions moving forward in time or purpose from the initial introduction of locale, characters and theme through a rising action to climax to falling action and resolution. Naturally, action cannot exist without conflict.

Let us use *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an example. Act I, the introduction, presents to us all of the human characters of the drama. It instructs us as to the time and place: ancient Athens. The initial speeches of Theseus and Hippolyta announce that the theme will be about love terminating in marriage. However, as soon as the complaining and demanding Egeus enters we know that this play will be a romp rather than an idyl. Conflict has been introduced along with four young lovers who will be the instruments to play out this conflict. But in spite of the extravagant grief and the poetic prophesying of tragedy in the speeches of Hermia and Lysander, we are made aware that this will not be a replay of *Romeo and Juliet* but a comedy.

Lysander. Ay me! for aught that ever I could read,  
                   Could ever hear by tale or history,  
                   The course of true love never did run smooth;  
                   But, either it was different in blood, —

Hermia. O cross! too high to be enthrall'd too low.

Lysander. Or else misgraffed in respect of years, —

Hermia. O spite! too old to be engag'd to young.

Lysander. Or else it stood upon the choice of friends, —

Hermia. O hell! to choose love by another's eye.



Lysander. Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,  
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,  
Making it momentary as a sound,  
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;  
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,  
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and  
earth,  
And ere a man hath power to say, 'Behold'!  
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:  
So quick bright things come to confusion.  
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act I, Scene 1)

On the surface this would not be out of place in *Romeo and Juliet*. The clue lies in the swiftness of Lysander's poetry and Hermia's interjections. Her interjections not only speed up the entire thing but also bring in a kind of wailing hyperbole. Tragedy by its very weight moves slowly and with restraint.

Act II takes place on the night prior to the wedding of Hippolyta and Theseus. It presents the development and complication of action and introduces the difficulties which must be resolved by the end of the play. Titania and Oberon with their fairy courts have arrived in the woods near Athens from the steppes of Asia. In accordance with custom they are to hold their revels on the night before the wedding celebration. (These fairy scenes are perhaps some of the most truly decorative in drama; unfortunately, they are also those which are most frequently overdecorated in production.)

The fairies of the play are Celtic and Germanic in their derivation, and many would contend that tossing them into an Athenian wood constitutes a break in unity. In defense of Shakespeare's unity let me point out that they behave much as Olympians: Titania is an imperious and jealous Juno; though Puck's tricks and humor are Anglo-Saxon, still he has Mercury's qualities and fulfills Cupid's function. Titania's and Oberon's poetic allusions and metaphors are classical. Their quarrel is soon to be echoed by the young lovers. The poetic symbols throughout the play are love-marriage related, having to do with romance, fertility, chastity, jealousy, and so on.



Into the same wood come the four lovers—Hermia and Lysander running away from the authority of Athens, followed by jealous Demetrius who is in turn pursued by love-sick Helena. Now begins the delightful nonsense brought about by Puck's charms.

In Act III confusion mounts as the clowns arrive for their rehearsal: Titania is bewitched; Puck places an ass's head on Bottom (a transferred value made palpable!); Bottom's confederates flee; both Lysander and Demetrius seek after Helena; Hermia is neglected by both. We have now reached the climax of confusion: the men prepare to fight a duel, the girls to scratch out each other's eyes; and meanwhile Titania loves an ass! Onto the scene comes Oberon who, functioning as the *deus ex machina*, prepares to unravel the tangle of the plot, for it lies beyond the capacity and abilities of the mortals, and so the supernatural element, the fairies, must do it by means of magical herbs.

The charms are undone in Act IV. Demetrius loves Helena, Lysander loves Hermia again, Titania is released from her spell and reunited with Oberon, Bottom is freed from his disfigurement. At dawn the fairies disappear and the Athenian court arrives in the wood. Order replaces chaos. The four lovers will be married with Theseus and Hippolyta, and Bottom gets back in time to join his cronies in their theatrical performance.

Total resolution comes in the last act. All three pairs of lovers have been married. The clowns present their play, ending the overall play in the spirit of nonsense. The final scene functions as an epilogue. Titania and Oberon bless the marriages, but Puck has one more duty to perform. He had not finished his work when he released the four lovers as well as Titania and Bottom from their spells. Someone else is still bewitched. That someone was you! Certainly you did not think you were a mere observer.

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear.

Wake up. Put on your coats. Get on the subway and go home.



We could take apart *The Tempest* in the same manner to show its overall unity in terms of action structure: a group of people are shipwrecked, complications develop on the island, and then, after everything is straightened out, they leave, no worse for wear. But let us do it another way. Let us see overall unity being accomplished by means of a single character's evolution and development. Prospero is the same man in Act I as he is in Act V, but he wears two faces — one face for the first half of the play and another for the last half. His character does not change; we merely see it from two different points of view. This change of aspect does not occur independently of the other characters. They and Prospero interact, and the result of this interaction brings into play various aspects of all the characters.

From Act I to Act III we see the first face of Prospero. With bitterness he recalls the perfidy of his usurper brother. As proud, omnipotent magician he controls even the weather. As puppet master he manipulates all the other humans. To Caliban and Ariel he is a stern tyrant. The point of change comes at the beginning of Act III as he witnesses the love scene between Miranda and Ferdinand. The austere outlines of "face one" begin now to melt into the gentler mellowness of "face two." It is as if he progresses in attitude from "Thou shalt not" to "The Lord is my shepherd" to "Forgive them for they know not what they do." The remainder of the play is an act of reconciliation: Miranda is given to Ferdinand with Prospero's blessings; the King of Naples and Antonio are forgiven for having overthrown Prospero, and they give him back his dukedom; Prospero relinquishes his magical powers and gives Ariel his freedom.

And now, lest you again thought yourself to be a spectator and not a participant, re-read the rhyming couplet that concludes *The Tempest* and consider whether its author had not intended irony. He who is captor has less freedom than he who is captive and so, when Shakespeare, speaking through the *persona* of Prospero requests his own freedom, it is actually you who are being released from the spell of the play. You have been freed along with Ariel.

There are other unities about which I have not spoken: the big three with capital "U's." You have certainly heard



of them. They are the Unities of Time, Action, Place: action is not supposed to admit any subplots; time is supposed to embrace either twelve or twenty-four hours; and only one place is used as locale. These are supposedly derived from Aristotelian principles; but I disregard them entirely, for they are no more than arbitrary, academic rules. Second-class minds always seek to reduce principles to mechanical rules. Shakespeare violated the rules; he did not violate the principles. *The Tempest*, incidentally, is the one play of Shakespeare's that does stay within the boundaries of the so-called Aristotelian concepts.

I have confined myself to speaking about that overall unity which Shakespeare created by means of action, structure and character development; but he also created unity in other, subtler ways—through the organization and integration of motif, theme and intent.

I chose to use *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for several reasons. First, the two plays have similarities: both are comedies; both are fantasies. Because of this I hoped that we should have greater freedom in analyzing their esthetic values rather than be tempted into discussions of "realism" and "reality" which have nothing to do with theater. I thought that we should not be led astray by consideration of historical validity as we might have been had I chosen a play with an historical background (I find it very difficult to read *Julius Cæsar* without one eye on Plutarch and history).

In fantasy, characters are more easily perceived as instruments of their creator's design. Since both plays take place within narrowly circumscribed worlds—Athens and its immediate vicinity, an unidentified island—dimensions must necessarily come through action.

Secondly, the two plays have differences: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written early in the poet's career; *The Tempest*, a product of his maturity, is a development beyond *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in terms of the playwright's scope. Though the element of illustration is of prime importance in both plays, the decorative element is stronger in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the expressive element is stronger in *The Tempest*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has



the charm of decorative illustration, perhaps parallel to the paintings of Watteau. *The Tempest* has the power of expressive illustration parallel to the paintings of Goya.

And now at the end of my discussion I wish to point out that I have purposely avoided mention of creativity in the sense of originality in respect to Shakespeare because I did not wish to become involved in the presentation of literary traditions prior to Shakespeare. It is only after we have acquired knowledge of those traditions which have preceded any given work of art that we can objectively evaluate the measure of its creativity.

So often we use the term "Shakespearean Tradition." What exactly do we mean by it? Why do we use it? When we say "Shakespearean Tradition" we do not mean drama in the tradition of Euripides, of Aristophanes, after the style of Seneca or the medieval mystery and morality plays. We mean that certain qualities of language and structure are found in particular balance, proportion and relationship. We are forced to use the terms because Shakespeare created in a way which had not been used before his time. Although he contributed magnificently to the English language, although he taught every writer who came after him, he has had no imitators; there has been no School of Shakespeare. He created in a way which has not been duplicated. So, we must speak of Shakespearean tradition, and, of course, we have nowhere to go for example except to Shakespeare himself.



*“Music, having sound as its medium, thus necessarily expresses in a concentrated way the shocks and instabilities, the conflicts and resolutions that are the dramatic changes enacted upon the more enduring background of nature and human life.”\**

—John Dewey

## Jean Sibelius’ Violin Concerto in D Minor†

by JOSEPH EASTER

### I

JEAN SIBELIUS was born in 1865 in Finland. He began his musical career with the piano at the age of ten. At fifteen he took up the study of the violin with the aim of becoming a virtuoso performer and to this end entered, in 1886, the Conservatory in Helsinki. He quickly realized, however, that he had begun too late to attain the technical proficiency necessary for mastery of that difficult instrument and gradually shifted his interest to musical composition. In 1889 he left Helsinki and travelled to Berlin and Vienna to complete his training.

At the Helsinki Conservatory Sibelius studied composition under Csillag, a Hungarian, and Wegelius, the Director of the Conservatory. Wegelius was a great admirer of Wagner’s music and attempted to direct Sibelius’ development in that vein; indeed, all of Europe was then immersed in the cult of Wagner, a phase comparable in its effect on the development of music to that of the early nineteenth century dominance of the French Academy on painting. But Sibelius found Wagner’s music “too rich, heavily perfumed,

\* *Art as Experience*, Minton, Balch and Company (New York, 1934). p. 236.

† Adapted from Seminar talk

brutal, rude, and vulgar," and he remained aloof from the general enthusiasm for it.

Sibelius' early musical preferences included the works of Mozart, Haydn, Grieg, Beethoven, and especially Tschai-kowsky, whose songlike melodiousness is a quality to be found in Sibelius' work. The Russian School of music, represented by such composers as Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Moussorgsky, Borodin, as well as Tchaikowsky, was in general important to his development; at that time Russia occupied Finland, dominating it culturally as well as politically. However, Finland was beginning to awaken to the acute nationalism then sweeping across all of Europe, a movement which also embraced the arts—poetry, drama, literature, music—and which demanded of them that they serve to give body to the national spirit and that they reflect the identity of the people from whom they sprang. Music, the least amenable of the arts to such specific usage and, correspondingly, viewed with less respect than the others, was made to express as best it could social themes and moods, and musicians sought to translate the great literature of their people and the grand events in the history of their country into musical form; knowledge of folk music and native styles and "sounds" became an essential prerequisite for the composer. This phenomenon led Sibelius to, or specifically enhanced, an interest in the music of Grieg, the first important Scandinavian composer; and, as Grieg had done, Sibelius, too, drew heavily and freely from the folk music of his country, adapting the spirit as well as given melodies to the various effects of the orchestra. In addition, "subjects" around which he wrote a great many works, including his first major composition\* of 1892, were taken from the *Kalevala*, a contemporary Finnish collection of national myths and legends.

Sibelius' love of nature was another important ingredient in his creative expressiveness. Indeed, he saw the world in terms of music: a story is told of him that, after smelling a drying hemp field, he ran home to translate the impression into music on the piano; he is reputed to have said that "a field of wheat has overtones"; characteristically, his first youthful composition was entitled "Waterdrops." Satisfying

\* *Kullervo*



his national pride and his appreciation of nature, Finland itself—the passionate quality of its contrasts, the rugged, rockbound country with its birch and fir forests, clear lakes, and jagged red granite coastline—provided a specific source for the feeling of the drama and mystery of nature that is basic to Sibelius' music.

Sibelius' major compositions were written between 1892 and 1926, after which time, although he did not die until 1957, he produced nothing of importance. The *Violin Concerto in D Minor* was finished in 1903 and revised in 1905; chronologically, it follows his first two symphonies (1899 and 1902) and benefitted greatly from the groundwork covered in these, which themselves lack the unity and compactness of idea of the *Concerto*. The *Concerto* was introduced in Berlin by the conductor-composer Richard Strauss.

## II

We are in our everyday lives, as well as many other things, listeners; listening is one of the ways by which we know what is happening around us. Listening to music involves time during which we are free from the mundane problems of daily living and can concentrate on an attempt to understand some aspect of life in a broader and more meaningful way; for, when what we hear is music, what is happening is not of the nature of information about a situation separate from us, but our own experience of an ordered, unified entity of change—sounds in a movemented sequence, each of which gathers meaning from the exact nature of its difference from the others in tone, time and character.

The possibilities of such meaning as experiences of the activity of change can have for us have their roots in nature. There we find breezes growing to winds, becoming gales and then subsiding; the changing of seasons, the ebbing and flowing of tides, the transition from plain to mountain, from day to night, from sea to land, the cycles of restlessness and tranquillity, of clash, resistance, submission, and pause—all of more or less significance to us as we are sensitive to their drama, their power, their subtlety, their ordered complexity, and so on.

Sound, then, communicates the activity of change. And as we become aware of activity we are stimulated. In music as in life we expect change, and this anticipation opens in us a potential for being deeply stirred or moved. The composer uses this potential of human nature by creating an entity made of sound so finely specific in its expression of the activity of change that it becomes an instrument of communication of his own experiences; and we are made more fully aware of what is possible in the world than we could ever have been without it. But this is only so if we perceive intellectually as well as emotionally the matter and organization in which the activity is embodied; it is only then that we complete the full act of appreciation, that we participate in the experience the composer communicates.

Although we often speak of sounds reflective of activity occurring in nature as music, such as the singing of the wind or the drumming of raindrops, musical art only begins when man consciously makes sound with various instruments of his own invention—plucking or bowing the taut string, beating the stretched skin, using lips and breathing to vibrate a reed against a hollow tube. Such instruments free sound from events and conventionalized or symbolic meanings, free it, that is, from restrictively representational or descriptive roles and render it capable of conveying meanings that owe their identity to our own reactions to a particular arrangement.

Music in its highest form conveys meanings wholly in terms of the qualities sound itself can by nature possess; and though the same qualities may also be part of our experience of other things (we know power as a feature of an avalanche as well as of a Beethoven symphony), as they occur musically they do so because of the relationships between sounds and not because the sounds ingeniously, naïvely, or in any way cause us to remember those things and situations with their qualities. We may, of course, think of an avalanche during a powerful passage of music; but if we are experiencing the music and that music is art, it is the avalanche that at that moment acquires the meaning of the music's power, and not the other way around, for the music is an entity in its own absolute right.



Music can, however, be composed to imitate situations, conversations, noises, events, feelings or thoughts: in fact, as indicated earlier, such an approach to composition was the fashion during Sibelius' maturing years. In its most explicit form it is usually referred to as "program music"; *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Dukas or *The Invitation to the Dance* by Weber are examples; in such cases, a printed story is offered along with the music so that the listener can follow the events supposedly told by the music. In his movie *Fantasia*, Walt Disney went so far as to present to our eyes events of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra providing the background music. The listener need not participate but only to acquiesce. Such music is by nature and intention mere illustration and necessarily inferior as art to music which makes use of the expressive capabilities sound may realize. However, music may be made to serve a representational role, to yield, for instance, the impression of the thunder of a stormy surf, while retaining an integrity as a musical entity; in this respect Sibelius' *Violin Concerto in D Minor* may be said to be, as we shall see later, illustrative.

### III

A concerto as defined in Webster's *Third International Dictionary* is "a virtuoso piece for solo instrument or voice and orchestra that is usually in symphonic form with three contrasting movements, the themes stated alternately by soloist and orchestra, and that is characterized by a bravura cadenza." A cadenza is "a technically brilliant, sometimes improvised, solo passage toward the close of a concerto in which the main themes of the preceding movement are given further development."

Sibelius opens the first movement of the *Concerto* with a short tremolo of strings, over which the solo violin immediately presents the theme—a hard, intense, steely, dramatically sinuous voice reminiscent, perhaps, of the texture of a cold wind blowing over a frozen lake. Such immediate introduction of theme comes from Beethoven, who was the first composer to do this in, for instance, his *Fourth Piano Concerto* and *Fifth Symphony*, although Mozart had

earlier indicated the way. In both Beethoven and Sibelius the abrupt coming-to-the-point works for a compelling immediacy; the matter of the introductory theme in Sibelius' *Concerto* specifically commands a response of expectancy in the listener by its mysterious and eerie sound: the alternation of a long, high first note, a short, higher second and a longer third note dropping in the scale below the first, sets up a dramatic contrast and forms a linear undulation not unlike the terse arabesque of Oriental decoration; the movement of the line is slow-fast-slow, up-down, as well as held, then let go and then held; and as the line progresses it becomes more jagged and the notes become more slurred, with their minor-key character emphasized. The qualities of this sequence of sounds are reminiscent of a river winding through mountains or a hawk riding the wind. These qualities of the introductory theme characterize the plastic unit with which Sibelius builds the rest of the work.

The theme is followed by three variations, each of which represents a foretaste of the character of the respective movements, thereby easing the way for the listener to a more ready grasp of the exotic qualities as they are subsequently explored. The first variation, presented by the violin and orchestra, is dominated by an activity of rising and falling driven to an increasing intensity and rapidity through the insistent recurrence of short, scale-like passages; there are dramatic leaps from high to low notes and from low to high, sometimes by quickly ascended or descended scales, sometimes by daring leaps that touch nothing in between. The effect is of a dramatic, poignant intensity, very much akin to the shrill, sustained character of Hungarian Gypsy violin music, a tradition to which Sibelius was probably introduced by his teacher Csillag and later shown its possibilities by Dvořák.

Gypsy music is vivacious, rich in color, haunting and exotic; the violin generally introduces the theme and is accompanied by the cimbalom and other instruments which provide the "orchestral" background. The Gypsy violinist is mostly concerned with pyrotechnics — the playing of difficult, emotionally charged, sentimental passages, in which the leaping from high to low notes, the trill of a high



note, the rapid speed of the scales, the sliding and swirling character of transitions such as Sibelius employs, prevail. Another important feature of this tradition used by Sibelius is the technical device of dragging the bow across more than one string at a time, producing dramatic combinations of seemingly discordant harmonies, always with surprises of new variations. Sibelius' introductory tremolo of the orchestra also calls to mind the tremolo quality of the Gypsy's cimbolom. Furthermore, in Gypsy music there is no merging of the violin and cimbolom: though they are played together, their sounds do not create genuine orchestral effects. And while Sibelius uses the orchestra to provide the background, one feels that the solo violin stays, for the most part, separated from the orchestra. In Beethoven's *Violin Concerto in D* the violin emerges from the orchestra; in Sibelius it plays against it.

Sibelius' use of the Gypsy tradition is not imitative. One would never mistake his *Concerto* for Gypsy music. In Gypsy music and in Sibelius' first movement of the *Concerto*, we find a similar use of the wave-like movement produced by long, slow, drawn-out notes contrasted against short, quick notes. The Gypsy slurs his notes to a greater extent, producing a more softly jagged, sentimental moan, while Sibelius makes his crisper, more forceful, more dramatically charged. The Gypsy tends to monotony in his over-use of a sustained quiver; Sibelius also uses this quiver but with a leaner hand and an ear for its particular service as a forceful and powerful element. Gypsy music is rhythmic and evokes the spirit of the dance; Sibelius' *Concerto* is for listening. Sibelius' work has greater dramatic contrasts of volume and range; it expresses the artist's control of his effects in a gradual and sustained attainment of a crescendo and its subsiding. The *Concerto* reveals an inventiveness in its varieties of sounds; though he borrows from the Gypsy tradition, Sibelius creates a sound totally his own. He has also enriched his music with the Russian tradition and Beethoven and as a consequence is, as we perceive his use of these traditions, richer than that of the Gypsies in esthetic effects, as well as deeper and more complex in expressive content.

The second variation of the first movement of the *Concerto* differs from the first in its somewhat warmer tones and slower rhythms. The third variation is quick and predominantly orchestral; it builds up with a mellow rhythm of bass strings, a forewarning of the rhythmic orchestral beat that characterizes the third movement. This is followed by the cadenza—an unusual placement. The cadenza was originally a pause in the music which the violinist was expected to fill with his own appropriate solo bravura passages. Needless to say, this took an exceptional soloist, and there are very few musicians equal to such a difficult task; cadenzas are now written by the composer. However, in these passages Sibelius retains the character of the free, spontaneous, technically complex improvisations which were characteristic of original cadenza playing: the notes are long and drawn out, and there are contorted, wrenched, squeezed qualities to the sounds.

The recapitulation ends the first movement with the violin and orchestra together playing the original theme in variation. The tone is now more mellow; woodwinds are more in evidence, along with a quieter playing of the bass notes of the violin. But the relief is shattered by a shrill, sustained trill of the violin, then by a bursting flood of rhythmic, spasmodic, delirious undulations by both the violin and orchestra which brings the movement to a close. It is like the mysterious, inevitable triumph of the flood of nature's life force bursting through.

In Sibelius' *Finlandia* there is an intense mystical quality. This mystical quality is also imparted by the first movement of the *Concerto* as it embodies a concentrated, vivid sense of aliveness—a striving and straining, a passing through to a peak of achievement, a birth, a victory. This quality in the *Concerto* is the basis of its capacity to engage our attention, and we are held by the intrinsic broad human values—drama, eeriness—as these are conveyed by the plastic means—harmony, rhythm, melody, etc.—through which we experience them.

The second movement opens with a warm glow of woodwind sounds, joined shortly after by the violin played in a soft, low, caressing key. The dramatic, pulsing flow and



strong contrasts of the first movement have vanished, as, too, have the apparent discordances. The melody consists of the theme from the first movement, but now slowed and quieted and made to convey a grace, a dignity and a stateliness. In this respect, the music of the second act of Tschaikowsky's *Swan Lake*, the *pas de deux*, comes to mind: the subject-matter is the same for both composers—tenderness and warmth voiced in a restrained, stately manner. In time, however, the orchestra in the *Concerto* begins gently to build up a tension, the strings gradually rise and become rich and full. The solo instrument, accompanied by brass, plays a bass note contrasted against a high note—two strings played in unison seeming to portray harmony. Tschaikowsky used a similar device in the *Swan Lake* by playing a cello against a violin, and Weber also did this in *Invitation to the Dance*; this device, no longer novel, is somewhat of a drawback to Sibelius' second movement, which is, on the whole, harmonious and gentle in quality. A rising to a peak and a graceful subsiding is followed by a sustained, rhythmic climax and a tapering off to a quiet, restful feeling of peace. The movement creates a one-piece, warm, swelling-and-ebbing mood, like the progress of the sun from dawn to dusk across the sky of a green summer's day. The exotic character of the first movement is abandoned for more ordinary effects, and the two movements are almost completely unrelated except in their sharing of the melodic theme.

The third movement, which Sibelius calls a "Tottentanz" (Dance of Death), breaks the glowing mood of the second with a deep bass rhythm, suggestive in its dark, throbbing power of the pounding of the ocean's surf. The violin bounces along with the bass rhythm, and this bouncy movement gradually increases in intensity as the violin acquires a sharp, mocking tone. Discordant harmonies return and are hurled and tossed among increasingly relentless pulsations, recalling by their weird intensity the final scene in Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal" of Death leading a line of struggling mortals. The violin is madly played with a wild, scrubbing motion, and unrestrained scales slide up and down. The *Concerto* thus ends: the triumph of Death completes the life cycle.

Sibelius' *Concerto* when viewed in its entirety emerges as a highly illustrative piece. We can say that the subject is birth, life, love and death, or the relentless, pressing change and power of nature, as well as other possibilities according to our experiences of life as recalled by the qualities embodied in and made specific through the organization of the music's sounds. The music is directly expressive of the broad human values of weirdness, a contortedly dynamic movementedness, drama, gentleness, tenderness, stateliness, power and passion. Therefore, it cannot be placed in the category of program music. Though its values are couched in the illustrative (we think of rivers and hawks, of dramatic or calm scenes, etc.), they are far enough removed from the literal to stand as broadened expressions of feelings; in other words, though the musical arrangement is suggestive of, or calls to mind, specific events or episodes from the world, that arrangement is essentially based not on imitative devices and conventional representations but on the characteristics and expressive powers of the medium of sound.

Sibelius' *Concerto* is a moving piece, illustrative of the power and instability of nature. The decorative qualities inherent in the composition—the dramatic contrasts, the qualities of sound of the instruments used and the manner of their usage, all of which please us by their sensuous appeal—have an immediate magnetic attraction. Its plastic means are varied in their presentation but unified by their expressive purpose: long, drawn-out notes against short notes and a deep bass give rise to a bouncy, surprising rhythmic quality; rapid and dramatic changes in pitch help to establish strangely sinuous linear phrases that qualify the movemented character of the rhythm; clean, hard notes contrasted with trills and the slurred and jagged transitions lend a sense of palpable texture to the sounds; and the minor-key tone, the delirious, wild, swaying motion of the entire composition effect an overall drama, by turn gentle, stately, passionate, shrill or dark and stirring.

After repeated hearings, however, one becomes aware of an over-emphasis on the drama. What immediately compels attention—the weird, contrasting, vivacious sounds and rhythms—seems to be stressed beyond its expressive



capabilities, especially in the first and last movements. The second movement is a much-needed respite between the highly charged impact of the other two, but the contrast tends to be melodramatic and obvious; that is, one is made more aware of the contrast itself than of what makes it up and what is thus revealed about this by way of the contrast. The appeal of the *Concerto* is, therefore, primarily to the emotions. Sibelius is ultimately concerned less with meaning that feeds our intellectual interest than with that which principally excites our passions.

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